WILLIAM D'ALBINI

OR, THE

SECOND SIEGE

OF

ROCHESTER CASTLE.

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OR,

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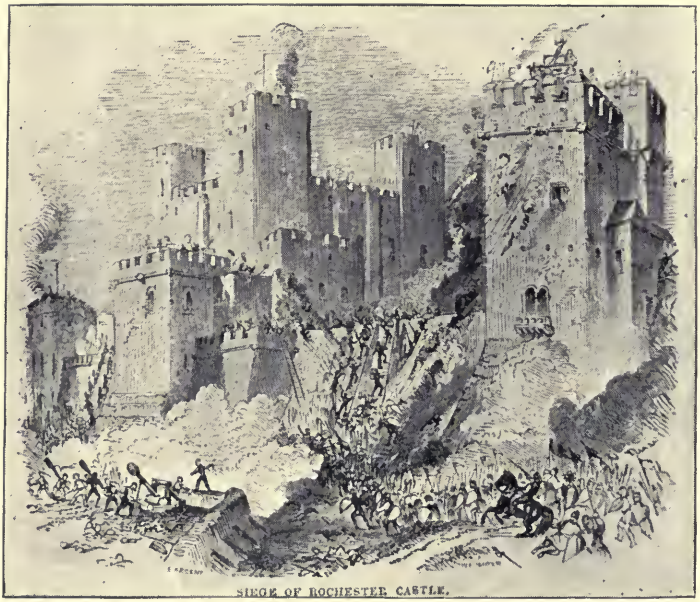

SIEGE OF ROCHESTER CASTLE.

WILLIAM D'ALBINI;

OR,

THE SECOND SIEGE

OF

ROCHESTER CASTLE.

BY

EDWIN HARRIS.

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TO

GEORGE PAYNE, ESQ., F.L.S., F.S.A.,

IN RECOGNITION OF THE VALUABLE INFORMATION REGARDING THE ANTIQUITIES OF THE CITY OF ROCHESTER WHICH HE HAS AT DIFFERENT TIMES IMPARTED TO THE AUTHOR, AND HIS UNTIRING SERVICES IN THE CAUSE OF ARCHÆOLOGY,

THIS BOOK

IS

DEDICATED.

1703794

PREFACE.

BEFORE writing the most difficult part of this volume, viz: "The Preface," I feel it my duty to thank the numerous subscribers to "Odo; or, the first Siege of Rochester Castle," who have helped to make it a financial success, and also for the many expressions of encouragement received from them. To these may be added the splendid list of subscribers to the present work, printed at the end of this volume, both marking their appreciation of my humble efforts to give pleasure in the study of the past greatness of our ancient City.

The Siege of King John marks one of the most important of the three Sieges, as the damage to the south-east angle of the Keep, which fell through the undermining, can still be distinctly traced, together with the part rebuilt by Henry III. In the repairs executed under the direction of George Payne, Esquire, F.L.S., F.S.A., in 1900, the portion of the arch at the apse end of the earlier Norman Chapel of the Keep was opened out, thus displaying the splendid proportions of the earlier work of William de Corbeuil in 1126.

A controversy occured in the daily papers last year as to who was the Standard Bearer at the Coronation of William the Conqueror. It was claimed by one signing himself De Albini, that he who had this proud privilege was Robert de Todeni, a Norman nobleman, whom Duke William of Normandy brought with a large train of Norman nobles over to England with him. This powerful

nobleman, Robert de Todeni, feudal Lord of Belvoir, and possessor of eighty lordships, died in 1088, leaving issue by his wife, Adela,—viz : William, who assumed the surname of Albini, and was known as William de Albini Brito, from having been born in Britain.

One of the descendants of Robert de Todeni, was William de Albini, the hero of our tale, a Crusader, soldier and scholar.

The name has been spelt in a variety of ways, viz :—D'Albinet, De Albinero, De Albini, D'Alligny, De Aubigne, Daubeney, Daubeny.

Walter Vynet, Robert Pende, Nicholas Lethenard, and Idonea, are all ficticious personages in connection with this novel, though their names are to be found in ancient deeds relating to the City and Castle.

History tells us that D'Albini was sent with a strong force to seize Rochester Castle; but how this was effected, whether by storming or stratagem is not stated. Also, that John undermined the walls; but the details are left to the imagination of the student or the invention of the novelist.

Without further detaining the reader, I will now leave him to pursue the fortunes of D'Albini, and trust that he will find not only enjoyment, but that he will become better acquainted with many Historic facts connected with Rochester, the City, the Castle, and the Cathedral.

EDWIN HARRIS.

EASTGATE, ROCHESTER,

July 1*st*, 1901.

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WILLIAM D'ALBINI.

CHAPTER I.

Introduction.

The narrative, that runs through the following pages, deals with that period of English history, which, although stained by the most barbarous and wanton cruelty, has yet left to England and her sons the blessings of liberty, first ensured to them by the signing of the Magna Charta by King John, at the instigation of his Barons, to protect their lives and interests.

This step had been rendered necessary by the treachery and cruelty of the King, whose royal word and even sacred oath were alike valueless to friend or foe.

John had disgusted the warlike Barons of England by his cowardice, and offended their families by his gallantries, whilst the middle and lower orders were groaning under the oppression of the tyrant.

Being of a cowardly nature, John was suspicious of all the English nobility, and so he surrounded himself with hordes of foreign mercenaries, who, having no local interest, were the better calculated to obey his commands, and to assist him in accomplishing his base designs.

During the struggle between the King and his Barons, Rochester Castle again played an important part in the national history.

When the Barons, after signing the Magna Charta, discovered the perfidy of King John, they immediately sent William D'Albini with a strong force to seize the royal Castle of Rochester, and to hold it on their behalf.

John no sooner heard of Rochester Castle falling into the hands of his Barons, than he placed himself at the head of his mercenaries, (who were generally cut-throats and murderers of every nationality) marched to Rochester, and immediately invested the castle. The King was also supported by Pope Innocent III., who issued a Papal Bull, commanding the Barons to return to their allegiance to the Crown of England, under pain of excommunication.

The Primate of England, Stephen Langton, a man of sterling qualities, ventured to oppose the thunders of Rome, and was true to the interests of the Barons.

John besieged Rochester Castle, which was bravely defended by Sir William D'Albini from the 11th of October till the 30th of November, when he undermined the walls, causing a part of the great Keep to fall.

By the capitulation of the castle and the imprisonment of William D'Albini, a heavy blow was given to the cause of the Barons.

John then proceeded throughout England, giving permission to his followers (and in many cases setting an example) to perform such unheard of barbarities, that they have gained for him the unenviable notoriety of being "the most cruel monarch that ever sat upon the throne of England."

For a time it seemed as though nothing could stop the tyrant; but a higher power than the Barons was soon to put an end to his cruelties and reign; for heaven, as if incensed by his crimes, struck him down immediately after the famous "Passage of the Wash," where he narrowly escaped the fate of Pharaoh and his host.

His death, which is somewhat involved in mystery, is usually attributed to gluttony, eating to excess of peaches or pears, and drinking large quantities of cider, at the Abbey of the Cistercians, at Swineshead. Another account, which gained credence, declared that the

monks poisoned him. He was carried in a horse litter to Sleaford Castle, and the following day, in a burning fever, was again removed to the Castle of Newark-on-Trent, where he ended his career of crime.

The old chronicles relate that John died in an extremity of agony and remorse. He was attended by the Abbot of Croxton, who gave him such consolation as he had to bestow.

CHAPTER II.

RUNNYMEDE.

ON the banks of the Thames, beyond Windsor, are to be found at the present time many pretty water-side residences, the owners of which can indulge in aquatic amusements, whenever their inclinations tend that way; whilst on its bosom are borne parties of pleasure seekers to the various islands dotted about in different parts of the river.

It is with one of these islands we are at present concerned, situated about five miles to the east of the royal Borough of Windsor, though at the time of which we are writing it was of very little importance; but it was destined to become famous and dear to the hearts of all Englishmen, as the spot where King John signed the Magna Charta or great Charter of England. The island is still known by its Saxon name of Runnymede.

On a glorious June morning, in the year 1215, the banks of the Thames between Windsor and Staines were seen at the zenith of their beauty.

The green meadows, sloping down to the river's edge, the luxuriant foliage of the trees, many of them overhanging the water, and the mighty Thames, rolling on its way from its source near Cirencester, to the Nore, uncontrolled by the numerous locks that now bar its progress to the sea, completed the landscape.

In the meadows, facing the Island of Runnymede, were encamped the Barons of England, a steel-clad host, representing the whole nobility of the realm, and attended by knights and men-at-arms, whose tents, covering a large tract of ground, added to the picturesque scenery of the locality.

Here they awaited the coming of King John from Windsor Castle, secure in the strength of their might, and justness of their cause; for Stephen Langton, the Archbishop of Canterbury, had blessed their arms, and was himself at their head, in defiance to Pope Innocent III. and the tyrant John. The Primate and the "Army of God and the Church" were prepared either to compel John to sign the Charta, or fight for their rights.

The sun was nearly in the centre of the sky, indicating the hour of noon—the time that had been agreed upon for the arrival of King John and his followers—when a scout rode rapidly to the Council Tent, in the centre of the camp,

where the Archbishop and the principal Barons were assembled. Without dismounting he proceeded to the entrance of the tent, and bending low to the august assembly, said, "My lords of the Army of God and the Church! King John has left Windsor Castle, and he and his followers are riding leisurely along the road towards Runnymede."

"Brings he a numerous retinue with him?" queried the Archbishop.

"I counted but five and twenty in all, your grace," replied the scout.

"Noble Barons," said the Archbishop, "to arms! and order your array as for battle, taking care that each leader displays his banner and device so that the tyrant may know, that not only the flower, but the whole of English chivalry are against him."

All was now bustle and confusion. Bugles were sounded, while knights, esquires, and men-at-arms were rushing hither and thither to the different positions that had been allotted them.

So well arranged were their plans, that in a very short time all were in their places, presenting to the eye a solid mass of warriors, with banners and pennons fluttering gently in the summer breeze. By the order of Baron Fitz-Walter, who had been elected their military

leader, such strict silence was maintained that they might have been statues, the barons and knights on horseback and the men-at-arms standing motionless.

Very soon King John was seen approaching, with Pandulf, the Pope's Legate, riding beside him, followed by Almeric, the Grand Master of the Templars, the Earl of Pembroke, eight bishops, and thirteen attendants.

"By the mass!" said the King to Pandulf, "our Barons make a truly formidable array, contrasting strangely with this poor cavalcade."

"My liege," replied Pandulf, "not only do they appear formidable, but judging by their stern demeanour, they fully intend that you shall sign the Charta."

"And so we will," replied John, "but the keeping its terms is a different matter."

Riding on they advanced along the lines of of the Barons' forces till they came opposite the island. A bridge had been made from the shore to the island, by means of two large trees felled and fastened together by cross pieces.

Over this rude structure rode John and his followers; dismounting, they gave their horses to the care of their attendants. The King then seated himself upon the throne, that had been prepared for him, with Pandulf on his right hand, behind whom stood the train of bishops;

whilst on his left were Almeric and the Earl of Pembroke with their attendants.

Meanwhile not a sound had been heard from the ranks of the Barons. Suddenly a solitary bugle rang out on the summer air; and immediately Archbishop Langton, followed by the principal Barons, marched on to the island.

Upon the arrival of Langton and the Barons before John, the Archbishop, addressing the King, said, "John, King of England! I, on behalf of the Barons of your kingdom, here assembled, present to you, for signature, the Magna Charta, which is based upon that granted to the nation by King Henry I. It contains seventy-eight clauses, which I will read previous to your signing."

"My Lord Archbishop of Canterbury," said John, "it is unneccessary for thee to read the Charta through, as we have made ourselves acquainted with the contents thereof."

"My liege," replied the Archbishop, "methinks 'twere well to read it through, in order to prevent any mistake; for once signed, the Barons will enforce the fulfilment of every clause, and will use to its utmost the power placed in their hands by this Charta."

"My Lord of Canterbury," said John, "the Barons are more suspicious of us than we of them. They wish to deprive us of our power.

So be it. We will resign our royal prerogative to their keeping, trusting to their oaths of allegiance to us to keep inviolate their trust, for the honour of England, and the benefit of our subjects. Bring hither a pen. We will now sign."

Pandulf, taking a quill from his girdle, presented it to the King, who rapidly signed the Charta. He then passed it to Langton, who called for each of the twenty-five Barons to sign the Charta in turn.

When all had signed, Archbishop Langton took the Charta, and holding it aloft, said, "Our rights are now secure, for the Charta is signed by both King and Barons; and may heaven's deepest punishment fall upon those who violate its agreements, or in any way act in contravention to its dictates."

As soon as the Archbishop had finished speaking, cheer after cheer broke from the Barons and their followers. Here, they fondly imagined, was an end of the struggle, for had they not, from the banks of the river, seen John place his signature to the deed that was to give them their freedom.

No Act in English history has ever been executed in such an open manner, or with so many thousands of witnesses, as the signing of the Magna Charta. No narrow walls with

a select few, but an island with no other canopy than the summer sky; while on the river banks stood the nobility and commoners of England, in the full panoply of war to witness the consummation of their labours.

CHAPTER III.

Windsor Castle.

When the signing of the Magna Charta was over, John at once mounted his horse, taking no heed of anyone, and rapidly rode back to Windsor Castle, followed by his attendants. On getting clear of the Barons' camp, he unmercifully lashed the noble steed he bestrode, till it rushed along the road to the danger of both rider and horse. Pandulf and the others did their best to keep up with the King, but were unable to do so; and they could only follow him to Windsor.

King John dashed up the hill leading to the castle, and on arriving at the tower, where his private apartments were situated, he threw himself off his horse, and with his whip lashed out at the attendants who had gathered obsequiously to assist him to dismount, and then entered the castle hastily.

Shortly after, Pandulf and the rest arrived at the castle, breathless with the haste they

had made in their endeavour to keep pace with the King.

"Where is the King?" enquired Pandulf of the attendant who assisted him to alight.

"He has gone to his chamber, my lord," he answered.

"Gave he any commands?" asked Pandulf.

"None, my lord," he answered. "The King threw himself off his horse, cutting to the right and left with his whip at anyone within his reach. He cut the face of one of his attendants open to the bone, and then rushed up the stairs, cursing and groaning like one possessed of an evil spirit."

"Follow me, my lords," said Pandulf. "We will to the King and administer such comfort as we can."

With slow and cat-like steps did the Legate ascend the stairs leading to the chamber to which John had gone. There was no need to inquire where he was, for long before they came to his presence they could hear him, like a wild beast, roaring, cursing and ramping about the room.

When John caught sight of Pandulf, he roared—"This is all thy doing. We were compelled by thee to accept Langton as Primate of England; now he rules it like a king."

"Have patience, my liege," replied Pandulf.

"Patience, indeed!" shouted John. "Had we the patience of Job, we could not forget that this day we have practically signed away our kingdom."

Again John paced the chamber, biting the end of his whip, which he still held in his hand.

"My son," said Pandulf, "when you are more composed I will speak to you. This business is not so bad but that it can be remedied."

"Remedied!" ejaculated John; "no! that is impossible. Everything is against us. Philip of France is ready to invade England, on the paltry claim of his son's wife to the crown. Our foreign possessions are wrested from us. Ourselves in subjection to the Pope; and now the Barons of England are practically in rebellion. Can these things be remedied?"

"Yes," replied Pandulf, "the power of the Church has always been greater than the sword."

"Then send forth the thunders of the Church and crush our enemies," said John. "At present the worst enemy we have to contend with is Langton."

"My son," said Pandulf, "those whom the Pope has raised, he can likewise cast down —Langton shall be deposed, and the Barons excommunicated."

"That will prevent any immediate danger, good Pandulf, but will not hinder Philip of France from invading England," said John.

"Philip dare not invade the patrimony of St. Peter, nor interfere with a vassal of the Holy See," replied the Legate.

"True, we have given our kingdom to the keeping of the Pope," said John, "and he must protect his servant and his possessions."

"The Church will look after its servants, but some exertion on their own behalf is necessary," replied Pandulf. "You should appeal to the Pope for succour. I will pen an epistle to Rome for you, and then despatch the Bishop of Worcester with it—the Barons will not suspect him of carrying the message, but will think he has gone on matters of the Church."

"My Lord Bishop of Worcester, art thou willing to undertake the journey?" inquired John.

"Yes, my liege," replied the Bishop.

"Execute thy commission satisfactorily—get Langton torn from his Archbishopric, and thou shalt be installed in his place," said John.

"My son," said Pandulf, "it will be also expedient to enlist in your service the aid of foreign mercenaries, to curb these unruly Barons."

"There we are powerless," groaned John,

"for we are beggared, both in money and possessions, e'en as our surname—Lackland—indicates."

"My son," replied Pandulf, "I am not one to give advice that cannot be followed. I will furnish you with gold for that purpose; it will be strange if that, together with the thoughts of pillage, does not entice to your side those warlike spirits with which Europe is at present overrun."

"Pillage, didst thou say?" cried John, "that word is too mild. Once let us find ourselves at the head of a sufficient force, and not only shall they pillage, but we will cause them to destroy wholesale the dwellings of these rebellious barons and their supporters; their lives shall be taken; their females corrupted, and their children so disfigured that they shall not afterwards be recognised."

"You will need a trustworthy agent to go over to your late possessions," said Pandulf, "particularly to Flanders and Gascony, and with caution enlist followers to your cause."

"Whom thinkest thou we had better entrust with the commission?" queried John.

"Almeric, the Grand Master of the Templars," said Pandulf. "The Barons will think the calls of his high office have taken him abroad."

"Almeric," said John, "art thou willing to try and obtain recruits ?"

"Not only willing, but ready to start on my quest at once," replied Almeric. "As Grand Master of the Templars, I can go unquestioned where another would be stopped. Having served in the last Crusade with Richard of the Lion Heart, I am familiar with many of the free lances and mercenaries, who are to be found on the continent; and doubt not but that I shall be able to entice a goodly force to England."

"I feel every confidence in the success of thy mission, Almeric," replied Pandulf, "but be cautious. Do not let them come over in large numbers, but in small parties; and order them to make their way to Dover Castle, where Hubert de Burgh will be instructed as to the place of their rendezvous."

"Thy orders shall be carried out to the letter," replied Almeric.

"My liege," said Pandulf, "with your leave, I will now retire, together with the Bishop of Worcester and the Grand Master of the Templars, so that each may prepare for his journey; the sooner they are on their way the better."

CHAPTER IV.

The Barons' Camp.

When the Barons saw the unceremonious departure of King John from the Island of Runnymede, followed by the Legate and all the attendants, they continued cheering as the natural outcome of their feelings upon the result of the victory they had obtained over John.

After the exuberance of their joy had somewhat subsided, the Barons adjourned to the Council tent—Langton carrying the precious document with him. Upon arriving there, Fitz-Walter cried, "Bring wine, in which to drink success to our cause!"

Obeying the commands of their leader, wine was quickly brought and goblets filled, while those who could not obtain goblets used their helmets and steel caps, for even the nobles of those days were not particular as to the character of the vessels from which they drank.

Fitz-Walter, with goblet held aloft, said in a

loud tone of voice, "To the Army of God and the Church, and confusion to its enemies!"

The toast was greeted with cheers, every man draining his vessel to the dregs.

Fitz-Walter, again addressing the Barons, said, "To commemorate our victory we will hold a grand and solemn tournament, on the second day of July, at Stamford."

"Barons of England!" said Langton, "you have this day achieved a triumph, but the conquest is not yet complete, therefore I advise you to be on your guard. Noted you not John's willingness to sign the Charta, and also the gleam of triumph in Pandulf's eyes, e'en as though they had won the game."

"Methinks Your Grace takes a melancholy view of our position," replied Fitz-Walter. "Have we not the Charta, with twenty-five of our Barons to act as guardians or trustees of the liberties of the realm. We are also to hold possession of the City of London, while Your Grace holds the Tower of London on our behalf."

"True, Fitz-Walter," said one of the Barons, "yet I am of the Archbishop's opinion. John we have always found treacherous; therefore it behoves us to be on the alert. The majority of our force go to London, and the citizens we know are our friends; but we should let

some of our number retire to the different parts of the country to which they belong, and keep a strict watch on all that occurs. Any strange movement on the part of John or his friends should be reported to the Barons in London, so that, if necessary, they may take action at once."

A murmur of applause greeted this speech. The Knight, who had spoken, was one who seemed well-known to all. He was a man in the prime of life, strongly built, with a handsome manly countenance, the chief characteristic of which was an expression of determination, that suited well his reputation as a soldier. This was none other than William D'Albini—a brave knight and good soldier—dangerous to foes, but staunch and true to his friends.

"D'Albini is right," said the Archbishop. "John will, no doubt, try to enlist foreign aid, while Pandulf will endeavour to get me removed from my position as head of the Church in England. This I fully expected when taking up your cause; but though a servant of the Church of Rome, I could not forget that I am also an Englishman."

"Thy cause is our cause," shouted several of the Barons, "we will stand or fall together!"

"My lords, I thank you," replied Langton.

"To-morrow I will proceed to the Tower; and should wish D'Albini to accompany me with as many knights as can be spared, to form a reserve force, ready for any emergency."

"We will all depart to-morrow, and make our way to London," said Fitz-Walter, "with the exception of those who return to their own castles."

"My lords," said Langton, "I will now withdraw and place the Charta in the keeping of my trusty followers, till the time comes when I can lodge it in a place of greater security."

Upon the departure of the Archbishop, Fitz-Walter said, "My lords, let merriment be the order of the day. The men-at-arms can indulge in martial games; and the archers shall shoot for prizes, which I will furnish. Let ale and viands be supplied—for we need take nothing away with us on our visit to the hospitable citizens of London."

"Long live our noble leader!" shouted the assembled multitude.

The camp was now all life and activity, entirely different to the scene presented earlier in the day, when they awaited the arrival of John. Here and there were formed in groups the different retainers of the barons, following the particular amusement which their fancy dictated.

A space had been cleared, and targets erected, and spirited contests ensued between the archers belonging to the various barons. In another part were to be found men engaged in sword and buckler exercise; while not far from these were some men-at-arms wrestling—two sturdy champions of different counties straining every nerve to win the prize.

Another party were busy with the good old English game of quarterstaff, plying their weapons with unceasing rapidity; while now and again a laugh and a cheer burst from the onlookers, as some successful hit was made.

Some of the veterans were reclining on the grass, with huge flagons of ale, recounting tales of battle and adventure in which they had been engaged.

Meanwhile knots of barons and knights wandered from one group to another, applauding the combatants and distributing largess amongst the winners.

The whole camp was now in a state of revelry from the highest to the lowest, having no care for the morrow. They continued their sports till the close of the day, when deepening twilight warned them to seek their couches upon the greensward, and prepare for the march to London, at daybreak on the morrow.

CHAPTER V.

Walter Vynet.

Towards the latter part of June, the Barons and their followers were domiciled in London and the outlying villages—meeting with free-hearted hospitality from the citizens. In fact, so welcome were made "The Army of God and the Church," that each day seemed but one long round of feasting and merry-making. Streets were thronged from daylight till dark with men-at-arms, all appearing to be in the height of good spirits and joviality.

One individual alone of all the vast concourse did not seem to share their happiness. This man made his way silently along the streets, avoiding the more densely thronged thoroughfares, and, notwithstanding it was midsummer, kept his face closely muffled up with his cloak.

Pursuing his way till he came to a dwelling, where more people were congregated than at any house he had previously passed, he stopped and inquired of a bystander as to who dwelt

there. He was informed that Fitz-Walter had made that place his headquarters on reaching London.

Thanking him for his information, he at once proceeded to the door, and informed the man on duty, that he desired immediate speech with the Baron.

"Marry! and what can thy worship want with the Baron?" scornfully replied the man. "Fitz-Walter does not receive all who call to see him."

"Nevertheless, my friend," replied the unknown, "I must see the Baron on matters of great import to 'The Army of God and the Church.'"

Scarcely had he uttered the last words, when Fitz-Walter appeared at the door, and turning quickly to the speaker, said, "Who, and what art thou, who desirest speech with me?"

"My lord," he replied, "one not altogether unknown to thee. I am Walter Vynet, King John's attendant."

"Why, man! I did not recognise thee, and no wonder, for thou keepest thy face so carefully muffled," said Fitz-Walter. "But what is thine errand?"

"My lord, I crave speech with thee in private," replied Vynet.

"I am now going to the Tower to see the

Archbishop, anent the tournament," replied Fitz-Walter. "'Tis now past the time named for our meeting. Thou shalt ride with my followers, and I will attend to thee as soon as I have seen the Archbishop."

Calling to one of his followers, he commanded him to give his horse to Vynet, and having mounted, they set off at a brisk rate for the Tower.

Upon the arrival there of Fitz-Walter and his followers, the Baron beckoned Vynet to follow him, and then led the way to the presence of the Archbishop.

"I am somewhat late, Your Grace," said the Baron, entering the chamber, while Langton advanced to meet him. "I have brought a servant of the King with me—one Vynet."

"Comes he as a messenger; if so, what is his message?" inquired the Archbishop.

"In truth, Your Grace, I know not," replied Fitz-Walter. "I was leaving my lodgings, when I heard an altercation between one of my followers and Vynet, who was trying to gain speech with me, on matters of import to 'The Army of God and the Church.' I then desired him to follow me here."

"Thou didst wisely, my lord," replied the Archbishop. "Come hither, good Vynet, and deliver thy master's message."

"My Lord Archbishop, and thou noble Baron," said Vynet, "I bear no message from John, but have come on mine own account to put you on your guard against his treachery."

"But how know we that what thou art telling us is true? It seems strange that thou, attached to the service of the King, shouldst come to us to expose his treachery," said the Archbishop. "What are thy motives?"

"Revenge!" replied Vynet, in a loud voice that startled both his hearers.

"What has John done to raise thine ire?" inquired Fitz-Walter.

"Gaze on my face," replied Vynet, withdrawing the cloak and turning his face towards them. Great was their astonishment when they beheld a terrible gash, reaching from his ear to his mouth, which was only partially healed, completely distorting his whole countenance.

"Did John do that?"

"With his own hand, Your Grace."

"What hadst thou done to annoy him?"

"Nothing, Your Grace," replied Vynet. "If thou wilt listen, I will give thee my motives. When John left the Barons' camp at Runnymede, he rode back to Windsor like one possessed of the devil. I was waiting in the courtyard to attend him, when, without any reason, he dealt me a blow with his whip,

stretching me senseless on the ground, and leaving this ghastly wound."

"And for that thou wouldst be revenged?" said the Baron.

"No, my lord," replied Vynet, "not for the blow, but for the bitter taunts which I have had to endure from him since. I would have borne the pain of the wound, for I have been his servant from his youth; but when I entered his presence next day, he called me offensive names, and jested on the injuries he had inflicted on me."

"So thou hast left him in anger?" said the Archbishop.

"Thou art wrong, again," replied Vynet, "I concealed my feelings, and affected to take his jestings in good part, while my brain was burning for vengeance. I waited till I had found out how he intends to keep his oath of good faith with the Barons, and have come to join thy ranks and put thee on thy guard."

"Ha! does he meditate treachery?" said the Baron.

"Yes," replied Vynet.

"Dost thou know his plans?"

"I do, my lord," said Vynet; "that was the the reason I dissembled, so as to put him off his guard."

"Tell us as quickly as possible," replied the

Baron, "all thou knowest of John's movements. Thou shalt be well rewarded, and I will give thee a place in my service."

"Gramercy! my lord," replied Vynet. "The Barons are going to hold a tournament at Stamford, in honour of their triumph, and have caused it to be proclaimed throughout England. When this reached the King's ears he was mad with rage; and, acting on the advice of Pandulf, has sent orders to those nobles who still adhere to his cause, to assemble quietly in and around Windsor, so that when you are all away at Stamford, he will march to London and endeavour to take the City and the Tower from your keeping."

"Said I not that thou wouldst find John treacherous?" said the Archbishop.

"Thou didst," replied the Baron, "but what wouldst thou advise us to do?"

"Abandon the idea of holding this tournament at Stamford," replied the Archbishop, "and find a suitable spot nearer London."

"I have it," said Fitz-Walter. "Smoothfield will be the very place, as it is close at hand, and will suit us better than Stamford—I will cause fresh proclamations to be issued."

"And I will send D'Albini with a strong force to interrogate John and accuse him of perfidy," said the Archbishop.

"Vynet," said the Baron, "thou hast rendered us good service—come with me—thou shalt never want a friend whilst Fitz-Walter lives. I will give thee a position of trust in my household, and, if we have to try conclusions in the field with John, thou shalt fight under my banner."

CHAPTER VI.

Rochester.

The ancient and picturesque City of Rochester, situated on an angle of land formed by the windings of the noble river Medway, had, from the time of the Romans, gradually risen to a place of vast importance, being on the main road from London to Dover. The City was walled and moated round, and within its walls were several streets, the principal being the High Street, leading direct from the wooden bridge over the Medway to the East Gate. The larger part of the City was occupied by the Ecclesiastical buildings, among them being the Cathedral built by the good Bishop Gundulf, together with the splendid Priory of Saint Andrew, containing within its walls over sixty monks.

At the entrance to the High Street, from the Barbican on the bridge, stood the hotel known by the sign of the "Golden Crown." The house was one of those large rambling inns with stone floors, large square rooms and low ceilings with massive beams.

On entering the door of the hostel, and turning to the right, there was a room used chiefly by the merchants and craftsmen of the City. In this room, at the close of a summer's day, sat several of the citizens with flagons of Kentish ale in front of them, discussing the forthcoming tournament, which had been proclaimed afresh that day in the City by a herald, who had proceeded on to Canterbury.

"'Twill be a grand sight this tournament in Smoothfield, and well worth the journey thither," said one of the company.

"I intend to go, since it is to be held so near," said another; "but I wonder why they have moved it from Stamford to London."

"Didst thou notice," said the landlord, who was standing near the door, "a messenger, who had evidently ridden hard, entering the City by the Barbican? He came here and called for a stoup of wine, and inquired where the Portreeve, Nicholas Lethenard, lived. On finding it was only a short distance down the street, he left his horse to be fed, whilst he went to see our worthy Portreeve. In about an hour the messenger returned, accompanied by Nicholas Lethenard, who requested me to look for Robert Pende, the young armourer (betrothed to his daughter Idonea), and tell him, as soon as he comes under the Barbican,

that the Portreeve wishes to speak to him at once on matters of great import."

Just at that moment the clatter of a horse's hoofs, on the paved space under the Barbican, was heard; and immediately after the armourer rode up to the door of the inn. Jumping off his horse, and fastening the reins to a ring in the wall, he entered the room, and desired the host to give him a stoup of wine.

"That I will, right willingly, Master Pende," replied the host, "but I have a message for thee. Master Lethenard desires thee on thy return to wait on him."

"Thanks! mine host," replied the armourer, "I will but wash the dust from my throat, with a drink of thy generous wine, and then will wait on our worthy Portreeve."

Drinking the wine, which the landlord handed to him, he remounted his horse and rode down the street to the abode of Nicholas Lethenard.

Robert Pende, the armourer of Rochester, was a man of about six or seven and twenty years of age, with a manly figure, and a fair moustache. His hair, which hung in ringlets round his head, was of a bright golden hue, bespeaking him of Saxon origin. He was dressed in a buff leathern suit, over which he wore defensive armour, not showy, but of the kind

that was intended to thoroughly protect the wearer. He was well-known, not only in Rochester, but in the surrounding country for the excellency of his work.

He was an orphan brought up by his uncle, who, having no children, had left him his business of armourer.

Nicholas Lethenard had one child—a daughter, the fair Idonea. Robert and she had been playmates from childhood, and they had grown up to love one another—the citizens of Rochester had always coupled their names together as if destined to become man and wife.

It was no wonder therefore that Robert was anxious to obey the request of Lethenard.

Riding down the street to his dwelling, which was situated on the north side of the High Street, he dismounted, and calling to an apprentice to take charge of his horse, he immediately entered the next house, which was Lethenard's dwelling.

The house of the Portreeve was a large rambling building, two storeys high, with three gable ends facing the street. The shop was low-pitched, though roomy. Here could be seen stored merchandise from different parts of the world, for Nicholas Lethenard was the principal merchant of the City.

Entering the door-way and walking to the

farther end of the shop, Robert, like one well acquainted with the ins and outs of the dwelling, opened a door that led into a passage-way. He then ascended the broad staircase, and knocking at the door, received an invitation to enter the room.

The chamber was a large one, with a very low ceiling, having two massive beams running at right angles, from the centre of which was suspended a curiously wrought lamp. The furniture was very plain but substantial. The occupants of the room were Idonea and her father, Nicholas Lethenard, a tall spare man with a black beard, but the few scanty locks of hair upon his head had begun to assume the tint, known as iron grey.

Nicholas was anxiously perusing a document, while not far from him was seated Idonea, a laughing brunette. Her beauty was of no particular type, but was attributable more to the varying expressions of her intelligent countenance. On hearing the well-known footstep of Robert, her face lighted up with a happy smile, while Nicholas withdrew his attention from the missive he was studying and greeted Robert.

"I am glad thou hast come Robert," he said. "I wish to confer with thee on matters of a serious nature."

"I had but just returned from Gravesend, when mine host of the "Golden Crown" informed me that thou wast anxious to see me on my return."

"Robert, I have had a messenger here from King John," said Nicholas, "who commands me to get the inhabitants in readiness, quickly, so as to hold the City against the Barons should they menace it; and as thou art the captain of the City Guard I will leave the matter to thee."

"I can easily manage that," replied Pende; "for Rochester has always been a loyal City."

"The King also commands me to inform Sir Hugh De Cramaville, the Governor of the castle, privately, of his wishes, that he may secretly victual the castle, and strengthen it on behalf of the King."

"It is fortunate that I can also undertake that task," said Robert. "I have to deliver to Sir Hugh a suit of armour, which I have repaired for him. It would be better for me to take the missive of the King to the Governor, so that I can prove my message to be authentic."

Robert then folded up the document, and placing it in his pocket, took leave of father and daughter.

CHAPTER VII.

William D'Albini.

Early in the morning following the disclosures of Vynet, a gallant party were forming within the walls of the Tower of London. The force numbered about two hundred, while at their head was William D'Albini, sheathed in a complete suit of armour; and by his side was Reginald De Cornhill, a brave and skilful warrior, who was to accompany him on his mission to King John.

The sun was just making its rays felt. Over the mighty Thames hung, like a mantle, a vapoury mist, which at this time of the year betokened one of those very hot days, almost tropical in its fierceness.

D'Albini rode round his troop and inspected them with the critical eye of a soldier. Finding everything to his satisfaction, he again placed himself at their head, and gave the signal to march. When they got clear of the Tower, D'Albini, putting his horse to a trot, was followed by his men, and they were soon

well on their way to Windsor Castle, to which place we will now precede them.

Since the signing of the Magna Charta, John had remained at Windsor Castle, giving no small amount of anxiety to his attendants by his varying moods. After the first paroxysm of his rage had abated, he strode about the Castle in a morose and sullen manner, holding converse with none, but secretly formulating plans for the entire annihilation of his enemies, as he termed the Barons.

At times, when thinking of his own degradation—first in becoming a vassal of the Pope, and then in surrendering his royal power to the Barons—he would work himself into such a fury, that it was dangerous for his attendants to come near him.

John, as we have seen, meditated taking London on the occasion of the tournament at Stamford, and had instructed his adherents to meet him at a given spot near London. He had just been informed of the new proclamation of the Barons, and the change of place. His vacillating and cowardly mind at once conjured up the idea that the Barons had discovered his perfidy, and would, perhaps, attack him at the Castle. So that when it was reported to him that, from the Round Tower, troops were seen advancing from London, he

at once concluded they were the advance guard of the Barons.

John quickly gave orders to his servants to saddle his horse, and prepare to accompany him to Winchester. He did not even stop to consult Pandulf, who was still at Windsor, but mounting his horse, and with only a small escort, dashed down the Castle hill and rode rapidly away.

In the latter part of the afternoon D'Albini and his followers rode up to the gates of Windsor Castle, and demanded speech with John. They were informed by Pandulf, from the battlements, that the King had gone to Winchester.

Courteously saluting the Legate, D'Albini wheeled his horse round, and led his men down the Castle hill to Windsor Forest. Riding on till he came to a large open glade in the forest, he commanded his men to dismount and bivouac for the night.

As soon as the men had supped, and outposts had been placed to guard against surprise, they laid them down to rest till daylight. Not so, however, D'Albini; for walking apart from the rest with Reginald de Cornhill, his lieutenant, he consulted with him as to the best course to be pursued.

"In faith, Reginald," said D'Albini, "I am

at a loss what to do. Would it be wiser to return back to the Tower of London, or to proceed to Winchester? Pandulf may have spoken us false, merely to entice us to an ambuscade, where we may be intercepted by some of the King's friends whom he has been assembling."

"I think it would be better to go forward," replied De Cornhill. "Thy instructions from Langton were to interview the King. Our force is strong, and by using extra vigilance we can evade all snares. Let us consult Vynet, who has accompanied us. He may have some friends here, who could tell him whether the King has departed or not."

"We will arouse him and inquire," said D'Albini.

Proceeding to the camp fire, D'Albini desired one of the men, who was keeping watch, to fetch Vynet. In a short time the man returned with the news that Vynet was not in the camp, and had not been seen since they left the Castle.

"I wonder if he be playing us false," said De Cornhill.

"Nay, I think not," replied D'Albini, "but rather that he has found some means of gaining intelligence of the King. We shall most likely hear something of him ere morn."

As D'Albini ceased speaking the sound of a horse's hoofs struck their ears, and Vynet shortly after rode into camp.

"My lord," said Vynet, "when you all left the Castle, I detached myself from the troop, and called upon the purveyor, who is a relative of mine, and resides nearly opposite the Castle gates. He informed me that he was in the courtyard of the Castle when John departed. He had about twelve attendants with him, from whom my relative gathered, that they were going to Winchester."

At daybreak the following morning, D'Albini and his men were in their saddles, and pushed rapidly on to Winchester, which they reached after a fatiguing ride; and encamped within about a mile of that place, resolving to interview the King on the morrow.

The next morning D'Albini and his men entered the gates of Winchester; and proceeding to the Palace, the leaders demanded an audience with the King. D'Albini and De Cornhill were then ushered into the royal presence.

John, who met them with a hollow smile and deceptive courtesy, said, "Welcome, noble lords, to Winchester! To what happy motive are we to ascribe this visit?"

"My liege," replied D'Albini, "Sir Reginald

De Cornhill and myself have come on behalf of the Barons, to request you to explain the reason of your conduct since the signing of the Magna Charta, which has been, to say the least, suspicious, if not treacherous."

"My lords," said the King, "we think our Barons use scant courtesy with us, that we are not allowed to remove from one dwelling to another without being interrogated by them. We presume, if our answers are not satisfactory, seeing the force you have brought, you will take your King back to the Barons."

"My liege," said D'Albini, "this flippancy is not to the purpose; we meditate nothing against your personal freedom. What we want are straightforward answers to our plain questions."

"Noble lords, we thank you for your considerations," sarcastically replied John. "Now to your questions."

"We desire to know your reasons for secretly issuing orders to assemble troops near Windsor?" said D'Albini.

"Hearing of the tournament," replied John, "which is purposed to be held, we merely commanded the presence of some of the nobles to attend us thither, so that we also might grace the tourney in a manner befitting our station as King."

"We are differently informed," retorted D'Albini. "It was really for the purpose of capturing London, during the absence of the Barons at Stamford."

John started at the reply of D'Albini, and said, "Noble lords, you have been misinformed —we have told you our motives; but sooner than the Barons should have any suspicion, we will forego the pleasure of attending the tournament."

"We also wish to know whether you intend to act strictly to the terms of the Charta?" inquired D'Albini.

"We intend to obey the wishes of our faithful Barons," ambiguously replied John; "and as a mark of good faith, we will at once retire to the Isle of Wight, where we shall be far enough away to disperse their suspicions of treachery. Have ye any further questions?"

"None, my liege," replied D'Albini; and taking leave of the King they withdrew and rejoined their men.

CHAPTER VIII.

The King's Treachery.

Within an apartment of the Tower of London were to be found Langton, Archbishop of Canterbury, Fitz-Walter and several of the leading Barons, who were listening to D'Albini's report of his mission to the King. He faithfully stated all that had taken place, and, as we are already acquainted with the particulars, there is no need to recapitulate them.

"That John means to play us false," said Langton, "I have never doubted. His civility is more to be suspected than his rage."

"Noble Barons!" said D'Albini, "though John's answers were so ambiguous that we have gained nothing therefrom, except an undefined feeling that he intends treachery, yet Vynet, who accompanied us, has been more successful; for mixing with the King's servants he found an old companion, from whom he managed to extract some news."

"Tell Vynet to come hither," said Fitz-Walter.

"He waits without," replied D'Albini. "What ho, there!"—send Vynet to our presence," shouted Fitz-Walter.

Vynet quickly made his appearance, and bowing to the Barons, inquired their commands.

"We wish to know what information thou canst give us as to the King's movements," said Langton.

"My lords," replied Vynet, "when in Winchester, I managed to see an old companion of mine—a servant of the King—from whom I heard that John hopes to retrieve his fortunes by the aid of the Pope, and the hiring of foreign mercenaries."

"Can this man be trusted?" queried one of the Barons.

"Yes, my lord," replied Vynet, "he is under an obligation to me: I once saved his life."

"Knowest thou who is gathering these foreign troops?" asked Fitz-Walter.

"Almeric, the Grand Master of the Templars," replied Vynet.

"That agrees with what we have already heard. Almeric, they say, has gone abroad," said Langton.

"At what part of our coast will they land?" asked the Earl of Gloucester.

"They will come to the Kentish coast and make for Dover Castle, where they will receive further orders from Hubert De Burgh; and many will be sent to reinforce Rochester Castle," replied Vynet.

"Who are their leaders?" inquired the Earl of Hereford.

"Savaric De Mauleon, Falkes De Breaute, and Peter De Mauley," said Vynet. "They and their men will arrive in small parties to avoid suspicion."

"Knowest thou aught else?" inquired Langton.

"Only this, my lord," answered Vynet, "that the King goes to the Isle of Wight, thinking you will watch him, and neglect Dover."

"Thanks, good Vynet, thou hast a second time put us on our guard. Thou canst now retire, but thy services shall not be forgotten," said Langton.

Vynet bowed to the assemblage, and then withdrew.

As soon as they were alone, Langton said, "We have just received confirmation of John's duplicity; it is no more than I expected. Now, my lords, what think you had better be done?"

"Attack the King and hold him as hostage," said Fitz-Walter.

"And by so doing call down the vengeance

of Rome," said Langton, "with Philip of France to execute it."

"What does Your Grace advise?" inquired D'Albini.

"Do nothing rash," replied Langton. "Let us be fully assured of the truth of what we have heard."

"What means thinkest thou would be best?" said Fitz-Walter.

"Let some of the Barons go quietly, as if journeying on their own affairs," replied Langton, "at the same time, taking sharp notice of the state of the towns they may pass through; and if anything suspicious occurs, return here and we will act at once."

"We could not do better than send D'Albini and De Cornhill," said the Earl of Gloucester. "D'Albini is one of the guardians of the realm; and De Cornhill has possessions in some part of Kent."

"My home," replied De Cornhill, "is at Maidstone, but I am well-known in Rochester. If Vynet, who has proved himself to be observant, was to accompany me as my retainer, he could stay in Rochester to wait for certain armour that I require from Pende, the City armourer, whilst I go on to Maidstone and other places."

"D'Albini can also be engaged on a mission

for me to Canterbury," said Langton, "where I have no doubt but that he will be able to gain intelligence of the forces that are arriving."

"We must not be idle in the meantime," said Fitz-Walter, "but must gather our forces here, so as to be able to act at once, if necessary."

"De Cornhill," said Langton, "trust not Benedict, the Bishop of Rochester—he is a creature of John's and joined Pandulf in anathematising the Barons. Helias, the Prior of Saint Andrew's, thou canst trust."

"I will not fail to obey thy injunctions," replied De Cornhill.

"It will be better to take only our ordinary retinue with us," said D'Albini.

"Yes," replied De Cornhill, "for we shall be travelling as brothers-in-arms."

"Thou hadst better set off by daybreak to-morrow," said Langton, addressing D'Albini. "I will furnish thee with authority to divers persons in Canterbury and its neighbourhood, who will give thee any information they may possess. Remaining at Canterbury for a time, thou mayst be able to gain some important tidings by means of spies, placed on the different roads, as well as at Dover."

"I will wait on Your Grace this evening," replied D'Albini.

"My lords," said Langton, "I invite you to

grace my board, for this discussion has waxed somewhat long; and while guarding our rights, we must not forget to fortify the inner man, that we may be found strong in the day of battle."

CHAPTER IX.

Rochester.

The road between Gravesend and Rochester has ever been notable as part of the great highway to London. It commands splendid views of the River Thames, which, as you travel on towards Rochester, give place to undulating scenery for which Kent is famous. Approaching Strood, you behold from the hills the River Medway and the City of Rochester, about a mile distant in the valley below.

It was a glorious summer's afternoon. The birds were singing in the trees, whilst high overhead the lark, soaring in the sky, added its beautiful notes to the melody.

On the road were a party of travellers, dusty and hot, who prove to be old friends. They were D'Albini and De Cornhill, followed by Vynet and a few attendants.

"I know not how it is," said D'Albini, "but whenever I behold yon Castle of Rochester, I always feel strangely moved. It seems to me

like an old friend, that will some day become intertwined with my fame."

"'Tis a magnificent pile," replied De Cornhill, "and may well arouse such feelings in the breast of any knight. Would that we had the defence of it, with some brave troops, methinks we could keep any army at bay: the Castle is well-nigh impregnable."

Thus discoursing, they arrived at Strood; and riding down its Roman paved street, and over the old wooden bridge, they entered through the Barbican gate of the City.

De Cornhill immediately led the way to the "Golden Crown." Riding into the inn yard, where they left their horses in charge of servants, they entered the house, and were met by the host, who bowed obsequiously to the knights—Sir Reginald De Cornhill being well-known to him. They were soon ushered into an upper room, and served with refreshments. Sir Reginald inquired if they could be accommodated for the night as he had some business to transact with Master Pende, the armourer, previous to riding to his dwelling at Maidstone. Mine host informed Sir Reginald that he had plenty of room for them, so the party rested there that night.

The following morning Sir Reginald De Cornhill, followed by Vynet carrying a hauberk,

proceeded down the High Street to the dwelling of the armourer.

"Good morrow, worthy armourer," said Sir Reginald, "I have brought my hauberk to be repaired. A number of the links have broken whilst exercising in the tilt yard."

"When wilt thou require it?" said Pende. "I cannot work on it for several days at least. I have here a complete suit of armour to finish for the Governor of Rochester Castle, for which he is in great haste."

"I am in no hurry for the armour, for at least a week," replied Sir Reginald. "I can leave my servant Vynet in Rochester to bring it on to me at Maidstone. He is somewhat anxious to see the Prior of Saint Andrew, whom he knew on the Continent. I will leave him at the 'Golden Crown,' and thou canst let him know when the hauberk is ready."

Leaving the armourer's shop, they retraced their steps up the High Street; and passing under the Cemetery gate, entered the precincts of the Priory of Saint Andrew, going along the north side of the Cathedral till they arrived at the eastern extremity of the venerable pile, where dwelt the Prior.

In the door-way stood one of the monks of the establishment, of whom Sir Reginald asked whether the holy father was within.

"He is, noble knight," replied the Monk. "Dost thou wish to speak with him?"

"Yes, father," he replied. "Wilt thou inform him that Sir Reginald De Cornhill wishes to commune with him?"

The monk departed, and after a short time returned to usher the visitors into the presence of the Prior of Saint Andrew.

Helias, the Prior, was seated in a large oaken chair, quaintly carved with emblems of Saint Andrew on the cross. He was intently reading the "Textus Roffensis," a book written by Earnulph, Bishop of Rochester, in the early part of the twelfth century, and which contained a collection of the ancient laws of the land. ([1])

The Prior was a man of commanding presence, with a shrewd intelligent face, the expression of which was somewhat softened by age; and he was dressed in the sombre garments of the Benedictine Brotherhood.

He rose to welcome Sir Reginald, with whom he was acquainted. "Welcome, my son, to the Priory of Saint Andrew," he said. "Hast thou journeyed from Maidstone this morning?"

"No, holy father," replied Sir Reginald, "I came from London, and reached here yestereve, as I wished to confer with thee on matters connected with this City."

"My son," gravely responded the Prior, "I have nought to do with the City; my duties are in the Priory."

"Nevertheless," said Sir Reginald, "the Archbishop has commanded me to inquire of thee for certain information respecting the state of the City."

"If the Archbishop wishes to know," replied the Prior, "I will tell thee all I can, for a more upright priest than Stephen Langton it would be impossible to find."

"Behold! here is the Archbishop's ring," said Sir Reginald. "Where is Benedict Bishop of Rochester?"

"At his Palace of Halling."

"Which cause does he favour—the King's, or the Barons'?"

"The King's. Dost thou not remember he joined in anathematising the Barons?"

"Thy views are not in accordance with thy Bishop's."

"No! but he being my superior, I have to hide my feelings."

"Has there been any indication of warlike activity here?"

"Yes! at the Castle, they have been erecting, on the battlements, engines for throwing stones; and orders have been given Master Lethenard to supply a quantity of stores and

provisions. Pende, the armourer, has been constantly going to and from the Castle."

"What about the citizens?"

"They are friends of the King, and will take up arms in his defence."

"Why art thou so certain of it?"

"About a week since, a messenger, whose weary horse bespoke the haste with which he had travelled, came to this City from London, and inquired for Nicholas Lethenard, the Portreeve. Since that time the Civic Guard has been doubled on the walls at night; the citizens are exercised daily with their weapons; and every preparation made as if an enemy were expected around the walls."

"I will report what thou hast told me to the Archbishop. I am now going to my house at Maidstone; but Vynet here, in whom thou mayst place the fullest trust, will remain for some days at Rochester, waiting for my armour, which is being repaired by Pende. I have given out that Vynet knew thee abroad, so that his coming to see and converse with thee will not surprise anyone. If anything should transpire worthy of notice, let him know, and he will find means to inform me."

Taking leave of the Prior, Sir Reginald joined D'Albini and together they proceeded to Maidstone.

CHAPTER X.

IDONEA.

THE daughter of Nicholas Lethenard, the Portreeve of the City of Rochester, whom we have already introduced to the reader, not only resided with her father, but also undertook the management of his household. Young ladies in those days were taught to be useful housewives, and it was not thought menial, even for damsels of higher estate than the merchant's daughter, to thoroughly understand their domestic duties.

Idonea had, all day, been busily engaged superintending the servants of her father's household, and had just retired to the parlour or principal room of the house, where we first made her acquaintance. She was seated near the window, engaged with her needle, ornamenting some article of feminine attire, when Robert Pende opened the door with the familiarity of a friend. He glanced round the room

as if expecting to see some other person present, but finding no one there, he advanced towards Idonea, and saluting her fair cheek in loverlike fashion, he inquired where her father was.

"Benedict, the Bishop of Rochester, has just returned from Halling, and sent for father as he wished to see him," she replied.

"Marry! I wonder what he wants with the worthy Portreeve," said Robert.

"Nay, I cannot even guess," replied Idonea. "He has been gone these two hours, and I am expecting him back every moment. Wilt thou not await his return?"

"Willingly, Idonea," replied Robert, "if thou wilt keep me company; for time ever flies its swiftest when I am with thee."

"Robert," she replied, "I also acknowledge that time goes too rapidly when we meet."

"I have spoken to thy father," said Robert, "and have obtained his consent to our marriage at Christmas. Will my Idonea sanction that arrangement?"

"E'en when thou choosest, Robert," she replied, casting down her eyes, while her face was suffused with blushes. "My heart has been thine from earliest childhood. It only wants the sanction of our Holy Church to make the bonds lawful—it cannot make them stronger."

"Spoken like mine own sweet Idonea," said Robert. "Ours shall be the blythest wedding that our dear old City has seen for many a long day."

"I trust it may be so," replied Idonea.

"I will tell thee a secret," said Robert, "which I know thou canst keep, notwithstanding all maxims to the contrary. I have been quietly working on new steel head pieces, breastplates, and swords for the whole of the City Guard, of which I am the Captain; they are stored in the top rooms of my dwelling."

"For what purpose hast thou done this?" inquired Idonea.

"Marry! to make our Civic Guard the best equipped and handsomest in Kent, or even in England."

"But what has this to do with our wedding?" wonderingly asked Idonea.

"Why! I intend to present them to the citizen soldiers on the eve of our marriage, so that they may grace it on the morrow."

So engrossed with the conversation had the lovers become, that they had not noticed the entrance of the Portreeve during the latter part of the conversation.

"God grant that they may not be required earlier!" said Nicholas Lethenard.

Both started; Idonea blushing greatly, while

Robert with a smile said, "I fear not but that whenever they are required they will be found trustworthy, for I have bestowed especial care on them."

"I doubt it not," replied Nicholas. "I have just left our Bishop, who has had a letter from the King, stating that he fears the Barons may attempt to capture the City and Castle; and he has exhorted him to remind the citizens of their allegiance to him, and of their duty to use the utmost vigilance in guarding the City."

"That is already done," replied Robert; "the guards are doubled at night upon the walls, and a sharp look out kept during the day."

"I know not what we are to expect," said Nicholas; "but yet I fear me that evil times are in store for Rochester."

"I hope thy fears are groundless," said Robert; "but I must own to feeling a vague uneasiness myself."

"We are not in a position to know what is transpiring in other parts of England," said Nicholas, "and only hear the garbled reports of travellers and others passing through the City."

"There was one at the 'Golden Crown' last night," said Robert, "who spoke of the rumour that John was assembling an army at Dover to chastise the Barons."

"And I have also heard," replied Nicholas, "from the captain of one of my vessels, who has just returned from London, that the Barons are arming there and elsewhere, and strictly questioning all who come and go; and that they have sent out spies in every direction."

"That reminds me," said Robert. "Sir Reginald De Cornhill called at my place, some few days back, to get his armour repaired, and left a servant of his behind to convey it to him at Maidstone, so soon as it was finished."

"Sir Reginald is a very worthy knight," replied Nicholas.

"Yes, but he was accompanied by another knight, named Sir William D'Albini."

"He is one of the Barons who signed the famous Charta," said Nicholas, "and one of the guardians of the realm."

"The servant who was left behind," said Robert, "was not one of Sir Reginald's regular attendants. I never saw him before."

"What was there in this servant that aroused thy suspicions?" inquired Nicholas.

"His speech was better than that of most servants," replied Robert, "while he took every opportunity of inquiring into the state of the City and Castle; and I have more than once seen him intently inspecting the gates and fortifications."

"I will at once to the Governor of the Castle and lay the matter before him," said Nicholas; "and, if need be, he can arrest and detain him prisoner until such time as we are satisfied about him."

"'Tis useless," replied Robert, "for the armour was finished yesterday, and he left the City at once."

"Then it cannot be helped," said Nicholas, "but we will take better notice in the future, for we have the King's command to do so. Whether the King or the Barons are in the right I know not, only that our allegiance is sworn to the King, so our duty is plain."

"And shall be well and faithfully performed," said Robert.

"Now, Robert!" said Nicholas, "instead of weddings we may have battles, so I think it would be better to be prepared. I would, if in thy place, present the armour to the guard at once."

"Right willingly," answered Robert, "for should some of the brightness be worn off, and the armour be battered by blows received in the defence of the good old City, it will but add more honour to the wedding."

"Right! Robert," said Nicholas, "but when dost thou intend to present the armour?"

"This very evening, the whole guard muster

for inspection. 'Tis nigh on the time, so I must now take my leave."

"We will join thee anon, and witness the arming of the guard," said Nicholas.

CHAPTER XI.

The Messenger.

William D'Albini and Reginald De Cornhill, after resting at Maidstone a couple of days, left that pleasant rural town and travelled by the Boxley road to Sittingbourne, and from thence to Canterbury, where, thanks to the instructions of the Archbishop, they were comfortably and even sumptuously lodged.

Upon inquiring of the persons to whom they were recommended, it was found that different parties had been landed at various parts of the coast, the whole of whom had made for the Castle of Dover; some of them only staying long enough at the Castle to receive instructions as to their further destination. Certain of the men-at-arms had been sent to Rochester Castle, and to other strongholds that were in possession of John's adherents.

Not content with obtaining mere reports, the two knights determined, if possible, to learn

more for themselves, and to disguise their persons and go as far as Dover. Accordingly, early one morning, the twain were to be seen leaving Canterbury in the guise of Benedictine Monks, mounted on quiet ambling palfreys, belonging to the Monastery of Saint Augustine.

After an uneventful journey, they reached the ancient seaport of Dover, and quietly betook themselves to the house of a fisherman (recommended by the Prior of Saint Augustine's), situated near the Snare or Pier Gate.

From the fisherman they learned, that he, while engaged in his daily avocation, had seen ships constantly coming and going between France and England, laden with men-at-arms and knights; and that three great leaders had arrived and were installed at the Castle, viz., Savaric De Mauleon, Folkes De Breaute and Peter De Mauley.

Having obtained this information, they determined to quit Dover at once, and make the best of their way back to London, so as to acquaint the Barons of the active measures that John was pursuing.

They saddled their horses and left Dover, riding as rapidly as possible to Canterbury, where they rested for the night. Here they found Vynet, who had come from Maidstone.

The next morning, arrayed once more in

their knightly habiliments, they were in the saddle betimes and journeying on to Rochester.

The weather all day was very sultry, and heavy black clouds, which had been gathering for some time, seemed almost ready to burst. D'Albini determined to stop at the first village they came to, and rest both horses and men, although he was anxious to get on to London.

They shortly afterwards reached Rainham and stopped at an old inn called "The White Horse," and there rested their horses and obtained refreshments.

The room into which they were ushered was one looking on to the highway, and immediately facing the village church, with its high spire.

The tables were speedily covered with viands; and the hungry travellers, with appetites sharpened by their ride, did ample justice to the fare provided. While eating their meal, the storm broke almost over the village, and flashes of lightning were succeeded by loud peals of thunder, which seemed to shake the inn to its foundation.

De Cornhill and D'Albini had finished their meal, and were standing at the window watching the severity of the storm, while Vynet and the rest of the followers stood within the shelter of the doorway to see the lightning as it played

around the spire of the church, threatening its destruction.

"Reginald," said D'Albini, "I hope the storm will soon be over, as I am anxious to continue the journey. We must be in London to-morrow, for it is important that we give the Barons notice of what is taking place."

Just then they heard the approach of a horse; and almost immediately after the animal and its rider appeared, dashing along the road at a furious pace.

"I wonder who it is riding in such a storm as this," said D'Albini.

"It must be on matters of great moment," replied Reginald.

"Holy Virgin protect us!" ejaculated D'Albini.

The horseman had just passed the window of the inn, when a terrible flash of lightning, that seemed to envelope the church steeple in a mass of luminous flame, startled the horse, causing it to rear and plunge. Its rider was caught by the electric current, and fell from his saddle, as if a bolt from a crossbow had struck him. (2)

Vynet, and those who stood in the doorway, at once ran to his assistance, and at the same time secured his horse. By the direction of D'Albini, he was carried into the house. The

others then withdrew, leaving the knights and Vynet to see if it were possible to restore animation to the man.

"Great heavens!" exclaimed Vynet, "this is Rudolf, one of the King's attendants."

"Ah!" ejaculated D'Albini, for as he unfastened Rudolf's doublet, to feel if his heart had ceased beating, he found a letter carefully concealed under it. "The man is dead, said he; but what have we here? Merciful Providence! it is a letter addressed to the Governor of Rochester Castle."

"It would be well to make ourselves masters of the contents," said De Cornhill.

Unfolding the letter D'Albini read in a low tone to Reginald, as follows :—

"To the Governor of Rochester Castle

"Greeting.

"These are to command thee in our "name to receive into the Royal Castle of "Rochester Hugh De Boves and his followers "to strengthen the garrison. They will sail "from Calais and arrive in the Medway in the "course of a few days. The vessels will sail "up the river at night, and the men are to be "admitted secretly into the Castle by the water "stairs. They will give the password—'Death "to the Barons.' The bearer, in whom thou "canst place the fullest trust, will remain

"with thee till their arrival, when he can "return to us with the news thereof."

"Given at our Castle of Dover,

"JOHN."

"'Tis the judgment of Heaven against the tyrant," said Reginald, "that has killed his messenger almost at our feet."

"Alas! It is often the case with those who serve unjust monarchs," said D'Albini.

Vynet had till this time been gazing at the dead man, when Reginald approached him and said, "Cheer up man! 'tis not the first time thou hast been a near neighbour with death. I will cause him to be buried in yonder church, and have masses said for the repose of his soul."

"I thank thee, my lord," said Vynet. "Poor Rudolf was ever a faithful comrade."

"Vynet," said D'Albini, "thou hast skill with the pen. Thinkest thou that it is possible to make an exact copy of this letter?"

"Yes, my lord," replied Vynet, "I can make so exact a copy that John himself would not know the difference."

"Then proceed at once," said D'Albini; "thou wilt find the materials in the package on the sumpter horse."

"What are thy plans?" queried Reginald.

"When Vynet has made a copy of the letter," replied D'Albini, "I propose sending him on with it to Rochester Castle."

"But that will be playing into their hands," said Reginald.

"Nay, I think not," replied D'Albini, "for as soon as Vynet has set off for Rochester, we will at once proceed to Maidstone. At thy house we can obtain fresh horses, and, by riding all night, reach the Tower of London early in the morning."

"But why send the letter to its destination?" inquired Reginald.

"For our own ends," replied D'Albini. "If the Barons follow my advice, they will use the vessels, that are lying off the Tower, as transports; and with the knights and men who are ready, we may reach Rochester Castle before Hugh De Boves and his mercenaries, and seize it on behalf of the Barons without striking a blow."

"The plan is good," said Reginald, "but all depends on speed."

Shortly after Vynet returned with the copy of the letter he had made, and on comparing them, it was found almost impossible to tell which was the original. D'Albini then asked Vynet if he would be the bearer of the despatch.

"Willingly, my lord," he replied. "It is well I am chosen, for the fact of my having been a servant of the King, and also of my knowing a friend in the fortress, will surely be of great advantage."

Vynet then took the copy of the letter, and folding it up, placed it carefully in his leathern jacket, and mounting the horse of the dead messenger, rode on to Rochester.

D'Albini, having called the landlord of the inn, discharged the reckoning; and Reginald, as he had promised, gave his purse to the host, requesting him to have the last rites performed for the body, and masses celebrated for the soul of the dead man.

The storm had by this time abated, having gradually gone down with the tide towards the Nore; and nothing but the distant rolling of the thunder was heard to denote that the storm was not quite over.

D'Albini then ordered the servants to saddle their horses, and shortly after they started on the road once more.

CHAPTER XII.

Rochester Castle.

The storm, which we have seen do such fatal work, had now given place to that calm serenity and fragrant air which usually follow such disturbances. The heavy showers that had accompanied it, sank into the parched earth, giving nourishment to the roots as well as refreshing the vegetation of the district; while the sun, which was now setting, gradually illumined the whole of the western sky in a halo of golden light.

On this pleasant evening Vynet was riding along the road towards Chatham. He appeared to be somewhat thoughtful, his mind dwelling on the sudden death of his late comrade. It was not that he was concerned about his errand to Rochester Castle, which was really one, not only of difficulty, but of danger. He gave no heed to this, for being a man of ready resource, he trusted to his own inventive genius to get him out of any trouble.

Noticing how rapidly the sun was setting, he roused himself from his reverie, and using his spurs, quickened the pace of his horse, for he was anxious to enter the City gates before the curfew rang.

The twilight had begun to assume the deeper shades of night as he neared the East Gate of the City of Rochester; and the Warder was in the act of closing the gates as he arrived.

"What, ho, friend!" he said to Vynet, "thou art somewhat a late comer; a little longer, and thou must have passed the night without the City walls. From whence comest thou?"

"Marry, Warder!" cried Vynet, "I see not how that concerns thee."

"Only as far as this," replied the Warder—"that I shall detain thee till I am satisfied on the point."

"That is more than thy life is worth," boldly replied Vynet.

"We shall see," said the Warder with a laugh. "Now, comrades, take charge of this man till our worshipful captain comes this way."

Holding a lanthorn to Vynet's face, after he had been forced to dismount, he started, saying, "This is he whom we were told to watch for. Note the deep scar across his face."

The guard conducted Vynet into a kind of strong room, at the foot of one of the towers of the gate, leaving some of the men to guard him.

Vynet remembered that Pende the armourer was captain of the guard, and he had felt before that Pende had a shrewd suspicion of the motive for which he was left behind in Rochester by De Cornhill. He had already made up his mind as to the story he should tell him, so that he now commenced to chat cheerfully to his gaolers concerning passing events and other topics.

About an hour after Vynet had been stopped at the gate, Pende visited the guard as usual, when he was informed by the Warder of the detention of Vynet.

Pende, who had generously given armour like his own to the Civic Guard, entered the guard room, and by the light of a lanthorn hung in the centre of the room, at once recognised him as De Cornhill's servant.

"So my friend we meet again," said Pende. "Where is thy master?"

"Where my master may be I know not, replied Vynet. When I left him he was at Dover Castle. But why am I detained a prisoner?"

"Because thou art not what thou wishest to appear."

"Who am I supposed to be ?" asked Vynet.

"A servant of Sir Reginald De Cornhill," said Pende.

"I never said I was Sir Reginald's servant," replied Vynet.

"That being the case," said Pende, "who, and what art thou ?"

"My name is Walter Vynet," he replied, "and I am a confidential servant to King John."

"Why then didst thou go with those two Barons ?" inquired Pende.

"By the King's commands, to watch their actions."

"What is thy business in this City ?" inquired Pende.

"I am acting as messenger for the King to Sir Hugh De Cramaville, the Governor of the Castle."

"We shall soon put that to the test," said Pende. "Thou wilt at once be taken to the Castle, and it will go hard with thee if thou dost not prove thy assertions."

While Pende was speaking he kept his eyes fixed on Vynet, expecting to see him quail at this last remark, but he was disappointed, for Vynet seemed to regard it as the best thing that could happen.

Pende, calling to several of the guard, bade them escort Vynet up the High Street to Castle Hill.

Upon their arrival at the Barbican of the Castle, Pende seized the horn and blew a loud blast thereon, that soon brought the Warder to the wicket.

"Good even, Master Pende," said the Warder. "What means this summons after curfew?"

"We have a prisoner," replied Pende, "whom we believe to be a spy, but who persists in stating that he is a servant of the King with a message to the Governor of the Castle. So we have brought him here to make his statement good."

"I will lower the drawbridge and give admittance," said the Warder.

The creaking of the bridge was now heard, as it was being lowered on to the single arch, that spanned the moat and upon which it rested. The gates were opened and Pende and his party were admitted within the walls.

The Warder directed a man-at-arms to conduct them to the Castle Keep, where the Governor was to be found.

Pende was ushered into the Keep, and shortly afterwards found himself in the Governor's presence.

"Well sir Captain!" said De Cramaville, in a deep manly voice, "what seekest thou with me to-night?"

"Pende then recounted his suspicions, and his detention of Vynet.

"Thou hast done quite right," said the Governor. "Fortunately I am acquainted with Vynet. I knew him when I was a page in the King's household. We will have him in."

"What, ho there!—bring in the prisoner."

The guard entered the apartment with Vynet, who, saluting the Governor, said, "I am glad to see thee, Sir Hugh, for by my faith these worthy citizens were so fond of my company that they e'en proposed keeping me with them all night."

"Master Pende, it is indeed Vynet," said the Governor. "Hast been to the wars, to get that ugly scar on thy face? 'Tis like the bar sinister across a fair escutcheon!"

"It was the result of an accident," replied Vynet, "during an encounter with a wild beast, in the presence of the King at Windsor."

"Where is the King at present?" inquired the Governor.

"At Dover Castle," replied Vynet, "where he has an army, which is daily increasing in numbers—but I am forgetting my letter," and

unbuttoning his doublet, he drew out the missive and handed it to Sir Hugh.

The Governor carefully read the letter, then turning to Pende, said, "Accept my thanks Sir Captain and prince of armourers, for the manner in which thou hast acted; but Vynet is here mentioned by the King as one in whom to place implicit trust. He also sends word that in the course of a few nights, ships will come up the river with men to reinforce the Castle, and that he wishes them to be admitted secretly. It will be well for thee to give orders for thy watch upon the walls not to take any notice of vessels coming to the Castle."

"Thy commands shall be obeyed," said Pende. "With thy permission I will return to the City."

CHAPTER XIII.

The Council.

We left D'Albini and De Cornhill starting out from Rainham. Proceeding a short distance from the village they took the road to the left, which led through the woods to Bredhurst, and from thence to Boxley and Maidstone.

The dwelling of Sir Reginald De Cornhill was situated on and overlooking the banks of the Medway, close to the Church of the Holy Virgin. It was a pretentious pile, which ultimately became the property of the Archbishops of Canterbury by deed of gift.

At Maidstone the two knights snatched a hasty meal, and mounting fresh horses, leaving their servants to follow, they rode, as rapidly as the state of the roads would permit, to London. They reached the Tower of London in the morning about six o'clock, and at once inquired for the Archbishop of Canterbury.

After the usual greetings were over D'Albini informed the Archbishop of the finding of fresh evidence of the King's treachery, which they

had obtained; and placed his plans before him for the seizure of Rochester Castle.

"My son," said the Archbishop, "this matter is too serious for me to direct on my authority alone. I will at once summon those of the Barons who are in London to attend a Council here at noon."

"I have no doubt as to the decision of the Barons," said D'Albini.

"Nor have I," responded the Archbishop, "but it is for them to decide."

"It would be well to make some preparation," said D'Albini. "In order to save time, we might make a selection of the vessels that are lying off the Tower, and proceed to embark arms and munition of war, without informing anyone of their destination."

"I approve of those steps being taken," said the Archbishop, "for that commits us to nothing. The seizing of Rochester Castle is of much greater moment, and means the commencement of civil war, the result of which it would be difficult to foretell."

D'Albini at once went to the river, and selecting several of the largest vessels, had them moored close to the landing places of the Tower, and commenced to load them with bows and arrows for the archers, swords and bucklers for the men-at-arms, and other

necessaries that were likely to be required for attacking or defending a castle.

At the hour of noon, Fitz-Walter and a goodly number of Barons met in the Council Chamber of the Tower, and not only heard the report of D'Albini, but also saw John's letter to the Governor of Rochester Castle.

D'Albini explained to the Barons his plans for the seizure of the Castle.

"Thy scheme seems feasible," said Fitz-Walter. "But supposing Hugh De Boves and his men arrive first, thou wilt not then attempt to take the Castle?"

"Unless I can enter it by stratagem," replied D'Albini. "Before leaving Maidstone, I sent two servants down the river to watch and await my coming in the reaches below Gillingham. I have also sent a small vessel down the Thames for the same purpose. If De Boves has arrived I shall know of it without leaving the Thames."

"Thou hast laid thy plans well," said Fitz-Walter.

"My lords," said the Earl of Oxford, "we must not delay matters. We cannot trust John; therefore in the interests of the 'Army of God and the Church,' let us send D'Albini to obtain possession of the Castle of Rochester.

It is necessary that we should hold it, as it is one of the most important in the Kingdom."

"Wilt thou accept the command of this expedition?" inquired the Archbishop of D'Albini.

"It is the wish of my heart," replied D'Albini. "The Castle of Rochester has a strange fascination for me. It would be necessary to take a powerful force, for the citizens of Rochester are for the King, and there is a strong garrison in the Castle."

"Thou shalt choose thy own followers," said Fitz-Walter.

"If we are successful," said D'Albini, "what shall be done with those in the Castle? Are they to be detained as prisoners, or liberated?"

"Make them swear not to bear arms against the Barons," replied Fitz-Walter, "and then set them free. If thou dost keep them prisoners, they will be consuming the provisions of the Castle to no purpose. It would be better still to send them to the Tower."

"Noble Barons," said De Cornhill, "I ask for the appointment of lieutenant to D'Albini. We have been together on several occasions, and I would fain follow his banner."

"Sir Reginald," said the Archbishop, "thou hast our consent, if it be agreeable to D'Albini."

"There is no one I would rather have than thyself, Reginald," replied D'Albini.

"We will now marshal the knights and men in the Tower, from among whom D'Albini can pick his force," said Fitz-Walter; "but remember not to mention Rochester as its destination, lest anyone should turn traitor, and put the Governor of the Castle on his guard. My Lord Barons, we will now to the Courtyard," continued Fitz-Walter, and leading the way there the Barons followed him down the stairs. Upon his arrival he put a bugle to his lips, and blew a sharp blast thereon that quickly brought the whole garrison of the Tower to the spot.

Fitz-Walter mounted his horse the better to address them. "Noble knights and veterans," said he, "it is necessary through the King's treachery to take some active steps. A strong force is required to start from here, under the command of Sir William D'Albini, a noble knight and brave soldier. Its destination is at present a secret, and its mission one of danger and difficulty. Those who are willing to offer their services for this dangerous enterprise will unsheath and hold aloft their swords."

With a ringing cheer the whole of those present drew their swords, and waved them in the air.

"D'Albini," said the Archbishop, "if thou acceptest the services of all who are willing, I shall be the only one left to guard the Tower of London."

"Nay, your grace! they would be too many for my purpose," replied D'Albini.

"True! but how wilt thou select those whom thou wouldst wish to follow thee?" said Fitz-Walter, with a scowl, for inwardly he was jealous of the popularity of D'Albini, not only with the knights, but the men-at-arms also.

D'Albini then addressed the assembled knights and men in a clear, manly voice.

"My friends, I thank you for this mark of your confidence in me as a leader, shown by your readiness to follow me on an unknown and dangerous quest. Amongst so many brave men it would be invidious to make any selection. I will leave it to chance. As our final encounter is likely to take place in Kent, let those knights and their followers who belong to that county ride out from the ranks; and be they many or few, they only shall share in our enterprise."

Immediately a number of knights broke from the ranks, rode over, and placed themselves behind D'Albini.

"In good faith," said the Archbishop, "I was afraid that all the garrison were men of Kent."

Upon counting them it was found that one hundred and forty knights belonged to Kent, and were ready to follow their leader.

William D'Albini and his lieutenant Reginald de Cornhill at once set about completing the equipment of the vessels and men to enable them to drop down the Thames with the next morning's tide.

CHAPTER XIV.

The Seizure of Rochester Castle.

The sun was just beginning to dispel the heavy morning mist that hung over the River Thames, as the flotilla, composed of six of the largest vessels that could be procured by Sir William D'Albini, left their moorings and proceeded to sail down the river, assisted by the tide.

The foremost vessel was the largest and contained D'Albini and De Cornhill, with as many knights and men-at-arms as could be crowded on board, D'Albini intending to be the first to land at the Water Stairs of Rochester Castle, and thus to have as many men as possible to follow him at once, so as to secure the entrance.

None of the vessels displayed any flags or pennons of the noble warriors they contained, but merely the flags that were flying at their mast-head when they were requisitioned by the Barons. The knights and men-at-arms

also were kept under cover, so that any one viewing them from the banks of the river would have taken them for harmless merchant vessels.

When they approached the mouth of the Thames, D'Albini signalled to a small vessel, which immediately steered towards him. The captain informed him that no strange ships had passed up the Medway, and that he had also been round into that river and picked up D'Albini's servants, who were on board, and who were also certain that the force of Hugh de Boves had not arrived.

D'Albini gave orders to sail round into the Medway, and anchor till dark in the first reach. He also commanded the captains of the vessels to remove the masts, so as to enable them to pass under Rochester Bridge. Trusting only to the oars, assisted by the tide, he hoped to reach the Castle at high water, which he learned from the captain would be shortly after midnight.

When the shades of night began to fall the vessels weighed anchor, and, keeping in the middle of the stream, resumed their voyage to Rochester. The knights and men were all armed and ready at a moment's notice to defend their vessels, if needs be.

Silently the ships crept up the Medway, gliding along like phantoms, the course of the river being bounded for a long distance by flat, marshy ground.

Towards midnight they neared the City of Rochester, when they took the precaution to steer to the opposite side of the river. Upon entering the Bridge Reach, where the river widened, forming a kind of bay, they drew into line and the vessels passing through the centre arch of the Bridge, they found themselves near the Castle.

D'Albini's vessel led the way towards the Water Stairs of the Castle. These stairs were wooden, and led down from the Castle walls to the river. They were so constructed that at night or in times of danger they could be raised by means of a chain worked in the towers above, and so could render that part safe from an invading force. ([3]).

On the approach of the vessels they were observed by the men on the look-out for them. A creaking noise was heard by those on board, which was caused by the wooden stairs being lowered by means of a winch and chain, similar to those used on board barges for raising the anchor.

The first vessel was quickly moored to the foot of these stairs, and the other ships as they

came up were lashed side by side, thus enabling the men on board to clamber over the bulwarks from one ship to the other, and so be ready to land at the stairs immediately.

D'Albini was the first to leave the vessel and mount the steps, closely followed by Reginald and a party of knights. Upon arriving at the top the knight in charge of the gate demanded the password. "Death to the Barons!" said D'Albini in a loud voice, but he added in a much lower tone the word "Enemies!"

"Sir Hugh de Boves," said the knight, "welcome to the Castle! Wilt thou pass on to the Keep, while I see to the disembarking of thy troops? The Governor is awaiting thee in the Baron's Hall."

"I will pass on, noble knight," replied D'Albini, "but not to the Keep at present. I will descend to the Courtyard, and first see that my men are mustered and quartered."

"E'en as thou wilt, my lord," said the knight. "Vynet will be thy guide."

Vynet, who was standing with a torch close to the knight, motioned D'Albini to follow. He led him to the Courtyard, and said to him in a low voice, "I have hidden the winch that raises the steps, so they cannot shut out the rest. It is just on the time for changing the

guards on the walls. The watchword for the night is 'Security!' Take a body of men with thee and relieve the guard. I will bear the light."

D'Albini spoke a few words to Reginald; and, commanding a certain number of men to follow him, he was guided to the ramparts by Vynet, and successfully changed the guard, leaving the whole of the ramparts in the keeping of his followers.

By this time the rest of the knights and men-at-arms were disembarked and marshalled in the Courtyard. D'Albini then desired Vynet to lead the way to the Governor of the Castle.

Crossing the Courtyard they went up the embankment leading to the drawbridge of the Keep, which they passed over, and entered the vestibule, where Vynet, who had already made himself popular with all, spoke to the drowsy guard, telling him that Sir Hugh de Boves and his men had arrived, and that he had orders to conduct them to the Governor.

They left the vestibule, and passing under the massive portcullis, ascended the stone stairs in the Tower till they came to the State Chamber. Vynet opened the door, and D'Albini, with about twenty knights, followed him into the Hall.

The scene that met their eyes would have seemed curious to anyone living in these days of refinement; but to D'Albini it presented only an incident of every-day life. The Hall was of grand and stately proportions, with a huge fire-place, in which blazed logs of wood. In the centre of the room was a large and massive oak table covered with the remains of the repast and flagons of wine. Around were seated a number of knights—some wholly equipped in armour, having recently left the walls, whilst others were in the military undress of the time. At the head of the table, on a daïs, sat Sir Hugh de Cramaville. He was a man in the prime of life, tall and strongly built, whose fearless and handsome face was flushed with wine.

He rose on the entrance of D'Albini, and said "Welcome De Boves to Rochester Castle! By the number of worthy knights thou hast in thy train, one would think thou wert going to storm the Castle, instead of to reinforce it."

"Sir Hugh de Cramaville," said D'Albini, "subterfuge is no longer necessary. Thy surmise is correct. I am not De Boves, but William D'Albini, one of the Governors of the Kingdom. The Castle is in our possession; resistance is

useless; therefore, surrender thyself prisoner to the Barons of England."

"Never!" replied the Governor, drawing his sword. "To arms, brave knights!"

D'Albini also drew his sword, the knights following his example. The Governor advanced to D'Albini and said "Have at thee, traitor!" dealing a blow at him, which was parried in the most skilful manner.

The fighting was now general and the scene was one of wildest excitement, for both sides fought with fury, while the attendants, who were unarmed, used the trenchers and flagons as missiles.

D'Albini and the Governor fought hand to to hand. Both were evenly matched as regards skill, but the advantage was on D'Albini's side, as he was fully armed. The Governor sought to terminate the combat by a furious onslaught, throwing all his strength into a thrust, which D'Albini avoided by jumping on one side. The Governor's foot slipped, and a well-directed blow with the flat of D'Albini's sword sent Sir Hugh headlong to the floor. In an instant D'Albini's foot was on the Governor's prostrate body. "Yield thee, prisoner! rescue or no rescue!" he cried.

The attendants, who had been hurling various objects at the intruders, now gave a yell of rage at the fate of their leader. One burly knave, who was near the fire, seized a large log of blazing wood, and with a true aim threw it across the room, whizzing like a giant rocket, striking D'Albini on the shoulder, making him reel, and then falling with full force on to the head of the Governor of the Castle.

This incident caused a suspension in the hostilities, D'Albini himself removing the log when it was found that it had smashed Sir Hugh's skull and killed him.

The knights, on seeing the death of their leader, threw down their arms and yielded themselves prisoners. D'Albini then made them swear that they would not attempt to escape or bear arms against the Barons. He also caused them to deliver up their arms and conveyed them on board the ships, with the exception of one knight, and under a strong escort sent them to the Tower of London.

CHAPTER XV.

Dover Castle.

Dover Castle, standing on the rugged chalk cliffs, overlooking not only the town but the English Channel, as well as many miles of inland scenery, was justly accounted one of the strongest fortifications of the times, being often termed the lock and key of England.

Within the Royal apartments of the Castle Keep, King John and a few English knights, who had remained true to his cause, together with a number of the mercenary leaders from the continent, were keeping high revels. At the head of the table sat King John, with Savaric de Mauleon on his right hand, and Faulkes de Breaute on his left, with many other brave, but lawless leaders.

A minstrel had just finished singing a lay in praise of England's fair dames, when one of the leaders, with a strong Norman accent, said, "I would fain behold some of these English beauties. At present all we have seen have been fisherfolk."

"Have patience, Sir Peter de Mauley," said John. "The campaign once started against the Barons, thou shalt have thy pick of the fairest, be they wives or maidens, and when thou tirest of them, thou canst give them to thy followers."

"I will not fail to accept of thy permission," replied Sir Peter.

"I not only give thee permission," said John, "but will also set thee an example."

Hubert de Burgh, the Governor of Dover Castle, who was one of the bravest knights upholding John's cause, now entered the Hall, when John at once said to him, "How now, De Burgh! Why dost thou not join us at the festive board?"

"My liege," replied De Burgh, "I am a soldier, having the charge of this Castle. No true soldier would neglect his duties for the attraction of a feast."

"Pshaw! De Burgh," said John, "there is no need to be so careful. We have an army here; and the two strongest Castles in Kent, nay in England—Dover and Rochester—are in our hands; so what hast thou to fear?"

Before De Burgh could reply, a servant approached the King, and said, "My liege, a knight (who has evidently ridden hard, for

his steed fell dead as he entered the Castle), demands instant speech with you."

"Bring him to our presence at once," replied John.

The servant withdrew, and shortly after returned in company with the knight, whose travel-stained and dusty appearance betokened the length of his journey.

"Sir John Huntingfield!" said the King, "Comest thou as a messenger from the Governor of Rochester Castle? If our memory serves us, that is the stronghold thou wast appointed to."

"My liege," replied Sir John, "you are right. I have come from Rochester Castle."

"Has De Cramaville sent thee?" asked John.

"Alas, no! he is dead."

"Dead!" echoed John. "This is too much. Whom hast thou left in charge of the Castle?"

"Sir William D'Albini."

"Confusion to him!" cried John. "By what right was he installed Governor?"

"By the right of might," replied Sir John.

"Thou speakest in riddles," said the King angrily. "Give us the plain meaning thereof."

"My liege," replied Sir John, "as soon as your letter arrived, a look-out was kept every

night for De Boves. The night before last ships arrived at the Water Stairs of the Castle. The leader of the party was the first to mount the steps, and he gave the password of 'Death to the Barons!' I went to inform the Governor of the arrival of De Boves, when shortly after the leader (whom we supposed to be he) arrived in the Baron's Hall, and declared himself to be Sir William D'Albini. The Governor and those who were with him drew their swords, and attacked D'Albini and his knights. The Governor's foot slipped, and he was killed by a log of wood falling upon him, but which had been aimed at D'Albini."

"My liege," said De Burgh, "said I not truly, e'en now, when I refused to join in this banquet? Had De Cramaville been at his post this might not have happened."

"True, De Burgh," replied the King, "Would we had more leaders like thyself. Then, turning to Sir John, he inquired as to what had become of the garrison.

"They were all taken on board the ships in which D'Albini's force arrived, but I do not know their destination," replied Sir John.

"How camest thou to escape?" inquired De Burgh.

"I did not escape," replied Sir John, "but was detained a prisoner by D'Albini till the

morrow, and was sworn not to bear arms against the Barons. D'Albini sent me here with this message—"Tell King John that we perused his letter to the Governor of Rochester Castle, ere it reached its destination, and took steps to thwart his intentions by impersonating De Boves, and so we gained the Castle. Let this be a warning to him to act in strict faith with the Barons in future, or beware of their vengeance."

"By the Mass!" thundered John, "he shall rue that message. We will wrest the Castle from him, though we spend a year before its walls."

"Whom did you entrust with the letter?" inquired De Burgh.

"Rudolph, one of our most faithful followers," replied John; "but it is plain he must have turned traitor."

"Rudolf!" suddenly ejaculated Sir John, "He did not bring the letter to the Castle. It was one Walter Vynet."

"Vynet!" said John, in surprise, "Had he any particular mark about his face?"

"Yes! a deep scar that greatly disfigured him," replied Sir John. "He told the Governor of the Castle that he received it in an encounter with a wild beast at Windsor."

"A wild beast!" roared John. "He also shall dangle from the walls of the Castle. Would we had killed him when we gave him that wound."

"My liege," said Savaric de Mauleon, "what do you intend doing?"

"To start for Rochester to-morrow at day-break," replied John. "We will now to our couches to rest, and with the morn away to Rochester Castle and invest it."

"To Rochester Castle!" shouted the knights, waving aloft their swords.

CHAPTER XVI.

The Governor and the Captain.

Robert Pende had seen the arrival of the ships, but true to his promise he had not taken any notice of them; nor was he aware that Sir William D'Albini had by stratagem won the Castle, and brought about the death of Sir Hugh de Cramaville.

The next morning he went into the house of Nicholas Lethenard, whom he found seated at the table, breaking his fast. There was also at the same board his daughter; while at the lower end were seated his serving-men and apprentices, for in those days master and servant sat down at the same table, the only difference being that according to their station they were assigned positions at the board below the salt.

"Good morrow, Robert!" said Nicholas. "Hast broken thy fast, or wilt do so now?"

"Gramercy, Master Lethenard!" replied Robert, "I have already done so, and am on

my way to deliver this dagger to Sir Hugh de Cramaville. There be some fresh arrivals at the Castle, and perchance they may require new armour."

"I wish thee success," said Nicholas. "Hast any fresh news ?"

"Only the arrival of the ships, which thou knowest of," replied Pende, "and the departure of Sir John Huntingfield, who passed out of the East Gate about half-an-hour ago, accompanied as far as the gate by some stranger knights. His mission must have been important, for he no sooner left the City than, clapping spurs to his horse, he rode away as if pursued."

"I wonder what has taken him so hurriedly away," said Nicholas.

"I know not," replied Pende, "but I will now go on to the Castle. If anything of importance occurs thou shalt be informed at once."

We will now precede Pende in his visit to Rochester Castle, and see how matters stand with them there.

William D'Albini, when he found himself master of the Castle, and its late occupants were safely shipped and on their way to the

Tower, at once took a survey of the fortifications, placing men at the various parts which he deemed necessary to guard, and disposing of others in such a manner as his military knowledge suggested. He permitted none to retire to rest till daylight had enabled him to inspect every part of the Castle.

He found it even stronger than he imagined it to be, every care having been bestowed upon it by the different Governors who had held this important post; but the stock of provisions was very deficient.

Walter Vynet had also been assisting in the work of exploration, and had just arrived at the Barbican, when Pende blew the horn at the gate. Vynet looked through the wicket, and, seeing Pende, told the Warder to admit him.

"So, my friend, we meet again," said Vynet, "only with this difference—the tables are turned. What business hast thou at the Castle?"

"I wish to see the Governor," replied Pende.

"Which character art thou enacting now?" said Vynet—"the armourer, or the captain of the guard?"

"Since thou seemest to be in authority," replied Pende, "I will let thee know that I came as armourer."

Calling to some of the men, Vynet said, "Guard this man till I return. I believe he is a spy, but we shall soon prove whether he be or not."

Vynet then went in search of D'Albini, and informed him that Pende was inquiring for the Governor of the Castle.

"How had we better deal with him?" said D'Albini.

"He is an upright and brave man," said De Cornhill. "I should let him know that we have possession of the Castle, and then try to win him to our cause; but I am afraid he will not join us, having sworn allegiance to the King."

"Bring him hither, Vynet," said D'Albini.

Vynet departed on his errand, but shortly after returned, and said, "Pende awaits without."

"Admit him," said D'Albini.

"What, ho, there! bring in the prisoner!" shouted Vynet.

Pende was ushered into the chamber, and was surprised on beholding D'Albini and De Cornhill.

"Sir Knight," he said, "why am I a prisoner?"

"Thou art now free," said Vynet. "I was merely repaying thee for thy kind attention to myself the other night."

"I did but do my duty," boldly replied Pende.

"We know that," said De Cornhill, "and respect thee for it."

"I wish to see Sir Hugh de Cramaville," said Pende, "as I have brought the dagger that he wants."

"Alas! he will want arms no more," said Reginald. "He is dead."

"Dead!" said Pende in surprise.

"It is indeed true," said D'Albini. "I am now the Governor of the Castle, holding it on behalf of the Barons of England. We gained the Castle by stratagem. De Cramaville fell trying to regain it."

"I am grieved to hear of the Governor's death," replied Pende. "Thou knowest that I owe allegiance to the King, and will faithfully execute my trust."

"Thou wilt not attempt to retake the Castle," said D'Albini with a smile.

"No, my lord," replied Pende, "but I shall at once send off a messenger to inform the King."

"That would be needless," said D'Albini, "for we have already despatched Sir John Huntingfield to Dover with a message of defiance, and expect soon to see John and his mercenaries before the Castle."

"Sir William D'Albini," said Pende, "I came to the Castle in good faith, expecting to see Sir Hugh de Cramaville. Am I at liberty to depart?"

"Thou art free to depart e'en when thou choosest," replied D'Albini. "Though circumstances force us to be enemies, we, at least, will be honourable ones; and, to prove it, I crave a boon of thee."

"If it is consistent with my duty to the King," replied Robert, "it is granted ere it is asked."

"I thank thee," replied D'Albini, "and am too much a soldier to ask aught that is not consistent with thy duty. The boon I ask is that thou wilt make the necessary arrangements for the burial of Sir Hugh de Cramaville in yon Priory. Here is my purse to pay what the Monks demand, and also for Masses for his soul's repose."

"Right willingly will I undertake the sad trust," said Pende.

"I give thee thanks," replied D'Albini, "and if ever it lies in my power to do thee a service, fail not to remind me of it, although I am afraid the next time we meet 'twill be at the sword's point."

"In whatever way we meet there is no doubt but that we shall greet each other as brave men should," replied Pende.

"I doubt it not, Sir Captain," said D'Albini. "Wilt thou now follow me to the Chapel?"

Leading the way up the stairs, D'Albini entered a small door on the left hand, which gave admission to the Chapel. Here lay the body of De Cramaville on a bier, fully armed, with the exception of his helmet, which was placed upon his breast; while above his head was suspended his banner. The sun was shining brightly through the windows on to the body, causing the polished steel armour to reflect back its rays like a mirror.

By the direction of D'Albini a party of men lifted the bier, and bore it towards the Priory, followed to the Barbican of the Castle by D'Albini, De Cornhill, and several of the knights bareheaded.

CHAPTER XVII.

Arrival of King John at Rochester.

The morning of the 11th of October, in the year 1215, broke with an autumnal mist. The ancient City of Rochester was enveloped in the cloud, which, as the sun rose, gradually gave way to a beautiful bright day ; the walls of the City, the Castle, and Priory, with its Church, standing out in bold relief against a clear sky.

Within the walls a state of excitement prevailed. The civic guard were standing around the East Gate, with armour cleaned and burnished, reflecting the rays of the sun at each turn of the warriors ; for the citizens of Rochester had learnt not only how to carry arms, but also to use them in the defence of their property.

Nicholas Lethenard, the worthy portreeve, was there in a strong suit of armour made by Pende, who accompanied him. To both these

dignitaries the inhabitants looked up as to the principal persons of the City—Nicholas, for his knowledge and sage advice in its government; and Robert Pende, as the leader of the warlike spirits who guarded the City.

On the walls were an eager group of citizens, all gazing intently on the great highway from Canterbury. Why were they thus eagerly scanning this road in particular? It was owing to the arrival of Sir John Huntingfield on the previous evening on his way to his estate, bringing the news of the march of King John, whom he had left encamped for the night near Sittingbourne.

Suddenly a cheer burst from those on the walls, for they had just discerned a body of soldiers coming over the brow of the hills in the distance. A small party of knights were evidently in advance, and were hurrying on before the main body. As they approached nearer it was found that King John was in command, attended by a number of the mercenary leaders.

Robert Pende, as soon as he was certain that it was the King, sounded the bugle he wore at his side, and marshalled his men into a compact body just within the East Gate. Mounting their horses, Pende and Lethenard

took their places at the head of the guard, and there awaited the coming of John.

In a short time King John and his party arrived at the East Gate, where they were greeted with cheers by the citizens.

Nicholas Lethenard advanced to meet the King, and, bowing till his head almost touched his saddle-bow, said, "Welcome, my liege, to your loyal City of Rochester!"

"By the mass!" replied John, "we are glad to visit our possessions, but we like not the occasion of it. The rebel D'Albini, however, shall feel our wrath."

"My liege," said the Portreeve, "if you will deign to accept of some refreshment at my poor abode—a short distance up the street—I shall feel honoured."

"Sir Portreeve," replied John, "we thank thee for thy courtesy. We will, however, only stay to take a stoup of wine in the saddle, for the dust has nearly choked us, and will then on to summon the Castle to surrender. Whose men are drawn up here?"

"These, my liege," said Nicholas, "are the civic guard under the command of Robert Pende, the armourer."

"By my soul!" ejaculated John. "A noble body. Their soldierly bearing and well-

burnished armour contrast strongly with the majority of mine own followers."

"Though our men be not so well equipped," said Sir Peter de Mauley, "you will find they will fight equally well."

"We doubt it not," replied the King, anxious to conciliate Sir Peter. "Let us proceed to the Portreeve's dwelling, and try his wine, for my tongue cleaveth to my mouth."

Nicholas Lethenard led the way to his house, followed by the King and his nobles. Upon arriving there Nicholas called loudly for wine to be brought. The fair Idonea appeared, carrying goblets; while behind came a serving man, bearing two flagons of wine. The first goblet that was filled was handed by Idonea to the King, who emptied it at a draught.

"Truly," said John, "We know not which to praise most—thy wine or thy daughter—for they are both beyond comparison."

While John was waiting for the rest to be served with wine, he was casting side-long glances at the fair daughter of Nicholas, much to her discomfiture.

There was one of the knights also who was scrutinising Idonea, but with vastly different feelings. This was Savaric de Mauleon.

"How now, De Mauleon," said John, "art captivated by the good looks of the damsel?"

"My liege," replied De Mauleon, "her face and figure carry me back to my youthful days. She reminds me of my sister, who was lost at sea."

The party had now finished drinking the wine, and began to make their way to the Barbican of the Castle, led by John, and followed by the civic guard, and a whole host of the soldiers, who had by this time made their way into the City.

Arriving at the Castle Hill, a herald rode forth from the ranks, and blew a blast on his bugle, at the sound of which William D'Albini, completely sheathed in armour, came to the battlements of the Barbican, and demanded to know the reason of the summons.

The herald answered him thus:—"John, King of England, here present, demands the instant surrender of this his Royal Castle of Rochester from the hands of William D'Albini. The said D'Albini and the rebels who are with him to be dealt with as the King may think fit."

To this demand D'Albini replied, "Tell the tyrant John that the Barons of England have fully discovered his treachery, and have placed

this Castle of Rochester in my keeping, to be held on their behalf, and I will surrender it only at the last extremity; also bid John beware, or the Barons will inflict such chastisement on him as he deserves for his treachery."

When John heard this reply to his demands, he raved and swore that he would not leave till he had captured the Castle. He at once commanded the walls to be invested, and from that time till sundown he worked with fitful energy to make the surrender of the Castle a certainty.

By this time the old City of Rochester was filled to its utmost capacity.

The citizens, who in the early part of the day had greeted the King and his followers with cheers, now began to wear grave faces, and to regret the reception into their midst of such a motley and reckless set.

The bands of men belonging to the mercenary leaders were accoutred according to the custom of the country from which they came, presenting to the eye a variety of men and armour of every country and date.

The language, too, that one heard on every side, mixed as it was with strange oaths and obscene words, comprehended every known

tongue of the Continent, reminding the hearer of the Tower of Babel.

If this assemblage of murderers and cut-throats—the representatives of vice of every shade—was terrifying to the citizens, it was regarded by the Monks of St. Andrew's Priory with absolute fear. The Monks represented to Bishop Benedict the utter lawlessness of the men, so that he ordered the gates of the Priory to be fast closed and barricaded.

The Bishop went to the Cemetery Gate, in the High Street, and from the windows saw the behaviour of the men, congratulating himself on having closed the gates, and fondly believing that he was secure within the precincts of his sanctuary. He little knew the fiend in human form with whom he had to deal.

CHAPER XVIII.

Sacrilege.

King John, as we have seen in the last chapter, at once commenced operations against the Castle. This, however, was not done without opposition on the part of those within. From the loopholes in the Keep and the towers on the walls arrows and other missiles were sent on their deadly errand, enraging the besiegers and sending many a ruffian to the ground. Nevertheless, the work of investing this stronghold still went on.

One of John's first objects was to destroy the bridge over the Medway, and thus effectually bar the progress of the Barons if they attempted to come to the assistance of D'Albini. This he ordered Pende to do.

It was with a sad heart that Robert Pende obeyed the instruction to damage the bridge over which he had passed so many times. He knew full well the trouble there would be in getting it repaired when the siege was over.

However, there was no gainsaying the King's commands ; so, taking with him a number of the civic guard and several craftsmen of the City, he commenced with hammer and saw to cut away and break down the joists of the wooden bridge from pier to pier. So well did he work, assisted by the men, that by midnight he had succeeded in making a terrible gap in the centre of the structure.

During the latter part of the afternoon John came to the bridge to see how the work of destruction was progressing, and gave further commands to Pende about barricading the bridge. Whilst so engaged, Sir Peter de Mauley came up with countenance darkened by rage. "My liege," said he, "methinks your reverend monks of Rochester show but scant courtesy to your anointed head."

"What meanest thou, Sir Peter?" inquired John.

"Those rascally monks," replied Sir Peter "not content with taking up about a third part of the City in time of peace, have had the temerity to fasten up their Priory Gates to prevent us from using some of their surplus room."

"True dogs in the manger," replied the King. "They cannot use it themselves, and will not allow anyone else to do so."

"By my father's soul!" said one of the leaders, "I would strip their Priory for them, and reward these honest followers of thine; 'twould be an incentive for them to keep to our banner."

"By the mass, thou art right!" said John. "We will storm the Priory, and give these drones a lesson."

"To the Priory!" shouted the leaders, and the cry was taken up by the men-at-arms, eager as they could be to take part in anything that promised them a share of spoil.

Down the street strode John, his anger gathering as he went, artfully stimulated by the remarks of some of the mercenary leaders. On reaching the Cemetery Gate John knocked with the pommel of his sword against the massive oak doors with such fury, that he made the archway beyond echo.

The wicket was opened, and a monk demanded the reason of the summons.

"Open the gates at once!" thundered John.

"My orders," replied the Monk, "are not to open the gates to anyone."

"Nevertheless, thou must obey our Royal order."

"I obey the Bishop," replied the Monk, and have naught to do with Kings."

The King, upon hearing the reply of the

Monk, used some dreadful imprecations, and commanded the gates to be burst in.

"Run to the Bridge, my men," said Sir Peter de Mauley, "and bring hither one of the massive beams they have dislodged, for that is the sort of key we must have to open the gates with."

A number of men ran to the Bridge, and, selecting a piece of oak about twenty feet long, carried it on their shoulders down the High Street to the gates. They next procured ropes, which they fastened round the beam, by which to hold it, and then with a cheer commenced battering in the gates, which shook with the force of the blows, but did not give way, for they were made of oak, cross-banded, and thickly studded with iron bolts.

Again and again did these men return to the charge until at length the gates were splintered, and one gave way with a crash. John at once rushed into the Priory Precincts, followed by the mob. He made straight for the Cathedral, where he found Bishop Benedict and nearly the whole of the Monks of the Priory gathered, supplicating the Saints to protect them.

John strode up to the Altar, before which stood Bishop Benedict, and, addressing him, said, "My Lord Bishop, what meanest thou by

closing the gates of thy Priory to a Servant of the Church and King of this Realm ?"

"My son," replied the Bishop, "I did it to defend this holy sanctuary from these lawless men."

"My Lord Bishop," replied John, "for the trouble we have had in forcing an entrance to these precincts, we will teach thee a lesson by taking up our quarters here ; and, for the insult to our followers, they have our permission to pillage the Priory and Church."

"My son," said Benedict, in a stern voice, "touch but one small crucifix and I will excommunicate you and your host."

"Dost threaten us ?" replied John. "Knowest thou that we rank as a Prince of the Holy Church, and that thou, although a Bishop, art only a servant and our inferior ?" Turning to some of his followers, he said, "Take this proud Prelate and confine him in a strong room of the Priory, feeding him on bread and water until his haughty spirit is bowed."

The men seized hold of the unfortunate Bishop, and locked him in a room of Gundulf's Bell Tower which adjoined the Cathedral, and then hurried back for fear of losing their share of the spoil.

"To the Refectory !" cried the King, "and try the cheer of those saintly monks. We will

take the shavelings with us to minister to our wants."

Many of the knights and men-at-arms followed the King to the Refectory, some of them standing badly in need of refreshments, having toiled at the siege of the Castle after a long march.

The rest remained in the Cathedral, ransacking the holy fane. The monks were roughly thrust aside from the altars, and everything of value stolen therefrom. The rich vestments were appropriated by the men-at-arms, and others were busy with their daggers loosening and extracting the precious metals and stones with which the shrines were inlaid.

The work of desecration was going on apace, when some of the men noticed the door of the ancient Chapter Room leading from the chapel. They tried to open it, but found it locked and bolted on the inside. They immediately tried to force an entrance, but the stout oak door resisted their efforts, although the men-at-arms endeavoured to batter it in with their maces and other heavy weapons. Finding they made little or no impression on the door, they paused to take breath, and consulted about the advisability of bringing a battering-ram to force an entrance, when the

door suddenly opened, and Helias, the Prior of St. Andrew's, stood in the open doorway.

The Prior was a man of commanding stature, with strongly knit frame, and formed an imposing figure as he stood facing the infuriated mercenaries, armed only with a strong and heavy mace.

"Forbear!" said he, in a voice of thunder. "This room contains naught of value to tempt your cupidity; only the ancient writings of the early Bishops and other books relating to ecclesiastical matters."

"'Tis a lie!" shouted some of the men. "We will see for ourselves."

"Again I say, Forbear!" replied the Prior. "The first man who attempts to pass this threshold shall feel the weight of my mace; and to enter this room he must pass over my prostrate body."

"Have at him," said one of the men. "Are we to be defied by a single monk?"

"No!" shouted the men.

They made a rush at the Prior, and tried to force their way into the Chapter Room. The Prior calmly awaited the onslaught, but when they came close to him, he swung the mace with such rapidity that many of his opponents fell back wounded and disabled.

There is no doubt but that the men would

have conquered at last by force of numbers had not, at that moment, Savaric de Mauleon rushed into the chancel with many of his followers, and, driving back the men who were attacking the Prior, commanded them to leave the Cathedral. They informed him that they had the authority of the King for what they were doing ; but to all this Savaric de Mauleon lent a deaf ear, and speedily cleared the building. Placing some of his men at the entrances, he commanded them to look to the safety of the monks, and then went himself to see the Prior, who had so bravely kept the Chapter Room.

CHAPTER XIX.

Comrades.

Having seen his men placed to guard the entrances to the Cathedral, Savaric de Mauleon strode from the great West door, along the nave and up the steps to the chancel, which was now quite deserted save for the presence of the Prior, who was kneeling before the shrine of St. Paulinus, engaged in fervent prayer.

Savaric, finding the Prior thus devoutly occupied, folded his arms over his breast, and stood there watching him with a meditative gaze. After some time spent in prayer the Prior rose, and beholding Savaric de Mauleon, started with surprise.

"What! mine old comrade-in-arms turned monk?" said Savaric.

"Yes, 'tis even so," replied the Prior. "When I returned from the Crusades, I found my wife and children had died, having caught a fever that was prevalent in the district. My grief

was great, for never had knight a truer or better wife. I was broken in spirit, and suffering from wounds received in encounters with infidels in Palestine ; and mine old companions in arms, I knew not where. Being alone in the world, I determined to seek that consolation which only our holy religion can give."

"But how camest thou at Rochester?" asked Savaric.

"I entered the Benedictine Brotherhood," replied the Prior, "at Waltune in Suffolk (where there is a cell, dependent on the Priory of Saint Andrew), and was afterwards transferred to this Priory. On the death of Father Ralph, the late Prior, I was chosen to fill his place."

"I thought, when I saw that mace of thine at work," said Savaric, "that I knew who wielded it."

"I give thee thanks, Savaric," said the Prior, "for coming to my rescue, and saving this poor carcase of mine ; but more so for saving the manuscripts in the Chapter Room."

"My men tell me," said Savaric, "that thy Bishop is confined somewhere about here by John's orders. We will release him."

"But will not that raise the King's anger," said the Prior, "and perchance make him deal

still more harshly with us ?"

"Tut, man ! what care I for John ?" replied Savaric. "He dares not to cross me, for I am too powerful, and he cannot do without me. If I withdraw my men from his assistance, he will have to abandon the siege of Rochester Castle."

"Let us search at once for Bishop Benedict," said the Prior.

"There is no need to do that," replied Savaric, "if thou canst tell me which is Gundulf's Bell Tower." (4)

"I will guide thee to it," replied the Prior.

He led the way to the North transept of the chancel, and down the steps, which were worn hollow by the pilgrims to the shrine of St. Paulinus ; and opening a small door in the wall of the North aisle, they crossed the yard to the Bell Tower. There they found the Bishop sitting on a bench, lamenting the fate of the Cathedral.

"Woe unto me," he cried, "that I should have lived to see John commit this act of desecration to my Cathedral, after standing by him when he needed it, and joining Pandulf, the Pope's Legate, in declaring the Barons accursed."

"Put not thy faith in Princes," said Savaric.

"Oh, that I were free !" said Benedict. "I

would at once seek Stephen Langton, the Archbishop, who would fearlessly oppose this tyrant."

"We have come to set thee at liberty," said the Prior. "Savaric de Mauleon came to my rescue, as I was defending the Chapter Room from the intrusion of the King's followers, and saved my life."

"If he will but give me a horse, and get me out of this city," said the Bishop, "I will bestow my blessing upon him. I have no other means of reward."

"A horse thou shalt have, and I will see thee safely out of the South Gate, as that is the most convenient."

The trio proceeded through the North door to the West end of the Cathedral, and then, procuring a horse from one of his men, Savaric saw the Bishop depart safely out of the City.

Savaric and the Prior now turned their steps towards the Cathedral, Savaric proposing that they should go to the Priory and see how John was disporting himself.

"'Ere we go there," said the Prior, "I would claim a few words with thee in private. If thou wilt follow me, I will take thee to a place where we shall not be disturbed."

Re-entering the Cathedral, they went down the South aisle, across the transept of the nave

to a small room, that appeared to be built in the thickness of the wall.

Ascending two or three steps, they entered by a narrow doorway and found themselves in a small chamber, lighted by a window between the buttresses. Carefully closing the door, the Prior said, "Savaric, what I am now about to inform thee relates to thine own kindred."

"'Tis strange that I should come this distance, and then hear tidings of my family."

"The ways of Providence are wonderful," replied the Prior. "Dost thou remember thy only sister?"

"Truly I do," replied Savaric. "I was forcibly reminded of her this morning, when the daughter of the portreeve gave the cup of wine to the King."

"Well do I remember," said the Prior, "sitting in our tent one evening in Palestine, when a new arrival brought the news that Idonea de Mauleon, when on a voyage along the coast from Brittany to Normandy, was drowned. The vessel was believed to have been wrecked, as there was a terrible storm at the time."

"Ah! well do I also remember that evening," replied Savaric.

"On my coming to Rochester," continued the Prior, "I was surprised to find Idonea

a resident in this City, married to one of its merchants, a man of high integrity, their family consisting of one child, a daughter, the exact counterpart of her mother, only in miniature."

"'Twas she whom I saw this morning," broke in Savaric. "I knew it, for there was a strange yearning in my breast when I beheld her."

"Thou art right; she is the daughter of Nicholas Lethenard. The vessel, on which thy sister embarked, encountered the gale. The sailors were all washed overboard, while the maiden who was with her leapt into the sea in sheer fright and was drowned. Thy sister swooned, and remembered nothing more, till, recovering consciousness, she found herself on a larger vessel, being carefully attended by a young man. Nicholas Lethenard (for he it was) had undertaken a voyage on matters connected with his business; and after encountering a storm sighted a vessel, tossed helplessly about by the waves. With feelings of humanity, he desired the captain to run alongside the derelict, to see if there were any of the crew still remaining, when, to his great surprise, he found only thy sister, apparently dead. He conveyed her on board his own ship, and by kind attention managed to bring

her round. They continued the voyage to Rochester, treating Idonea with every respect and consideration. Nicholas, learning the friendless situation of Idonea and being deeply in love with her, asked and obtained her consent to become his wife. They were married in this Cathedral, and a few years afterwards thy sister was buried in the Cemetery of the Priory, leaving Nicholas and his young daughter to mourn for her."

"I will claim kinship with them anon, but till then tell no one of this," said Savaric. "In the meantime I will guard them, and see that they are not robbed by any of the rabble who are with us."

"Thy secret shall be kept," replied the Prior.

"I have changed my mind, and will not go to John at present," said Savaric, "but will visit the men, and see that all is well round the defences. That will allow me time to ponder on what I have just heard."

Taking leave of Prior Helias, Savaric went to the outworks of the Castle, and, with the quick eye of a leader, noted how the siege was progressing. From thence he went to the Bridge, and, passing under the Barbican, he met Lethenard and Pende.

"Good even, my friends!" said Savaric. "I

was about to see how you had fortified the Bridge."

"Come this way, sir knight," said Pende. "I shall be glad of any suggestion which thy experience may give."

The trio went towards the centre of the Bridge, where Savaric pointed out to Pende several things that could be done to strengthen its defences, at which the citizens were still labouring.

Savaric turned to retrace his steps, and said to Nicholas, "Worthy Portreeve, I must now get me down into the City to look for quarters, for I have been at the siege till a short time ago, when the noise at the Priory attracted my attention, and, calling to some of my followers, I went to inquire into the cause thereof."

"Is it true that the Bishop is a prisoner, the Prior dead, and the Cathedral sacked?" inquired Pende.

"Stop! sir captain," laughed Savaric. "Propound not too many questions at once. The Bishop was a prisoner, but I have liberated him, and he is now on his way to the Archbishop to lay his plaint before him. I rescued the Prior, or he would have been slain while fighting nobly. The Cathedral has been sacked, but that can soon be put right. The crafty

monks know well how to secure more gold and silver, I ween."

"Sir Knight," said Nicholas, "I also have a question to propound. Thou desirest quarters. Wilt thou deign to accept such accommodation as my poor house affords?"

"I will gladly accept thy offer, Master Lethenard," replied Savaric. "Meanwhile, I will go to the King, and rejoin thee after seeing the guards posted for the night."

CHAPTER XX.

Savaric de Mauleon.

Savaric de Mauleon was a knight who had gained renown in the Crusades, where he had served under the banner of Richard, Cœur de Lion, the bravest knight in Christendom. Through association with Richard, he had imbibed many of his manners, and at the same time his noble and chivalrous ideas.

Savaric was just beyond the prime of life, brave and fearless, his whole life having been passed where battle raged, either in the Crusades, or in some of the petty wars of foreign potentates, by whom many parts of the continent were kept in a constant state of ferment.

It was no idle boast when he said that, if he withdrew his assistance from John, the tyrant would have to raise the siege of Rochester Castle. Not only was his great military knowledge, combined with valour, of the greatest importance to John, but so great was his fame, that thousands had assembled under his

banner to follow so renowned a leader to such a rich country as England was reputed to be.

Savaric, as we have seen, left the Bridge and walked towards the out-works in order to ascertain whether the guards were set for the night round the Castle. He walked down the High Street in a meditative mood, his breast swelling with tumultuous feelings. Proceeding round the out-works, he found that everything was in order to guard against surprise from those within the Castle.

Savaric then went to the Priory, and, when once within the precincts, there was no need to inquire where the King was holding his revels, for the sounds of merriment were a sufficient guide. John had selected the Chapter House for this purpose.

The Chapter House was situated on the south side of the Cathedral, and was used by the Prior and monks when assembled in solemn conclave. Here also they proceeded to the election of a Prior from one of their own brotherhood whenever that office became vacant; and all other matters of importance were transacted there by them.

What a contrast, on this October evening, to the usual quietude that was wont to be observed in the Priory and its precincts, for the Benedictine Brotherhood were bound by

their rules to keep the strictest silence in all their religious buildings.

When Savaric de Mauleon entered the Chapter House, he found the King seated in the Prior's chair at the head of the table, his face flushed with wine. Around the table were gathered many of his followers, attacking the good cheer that was before them, or paying deep attention to the flagons of wine, for which the Priory cellars were noted.

The monks were compelled to act the part of attendants at this Bacchanalian feast, and many scurrilous jests as well as rough horse-play were levelled at them by the revellers.

"Bring more wine," said the King to one of the monks; "in faith, thou art somewhat niggardly with it."

"My liege," said one of the Knights, "they need not be, for they have plenty. I saw a number of barrels when I went to the cellars a-while ago."

"'Tis a good thought," said the King. "Thou, knowing the way, hadst better accompany the monk, to ensure that he does not add o ison to the wine, to show his love for us."

"Now, monk, move thyself as if the devil were after thee," said the knight, at the same time pricking him with the point of his dagger.

"I verily believe he is," said the monk.

The King, now observing Savaric, cried, "Come hither, Sir Savaric de Mauleon. We hear thou hast dared to release the Bishop of Rochester, contrary to our commands."

"I have released the Bishop," replied Savaric; "but when thou sayest dared, marry! what is there that I dare not do?"

"Remember that this realm is ours," said John, with drunken gravity, "and that our commands are to be obeyed."

"Remember, also, that I am no subject of yours," replied Savaric, "and can withdraw my followers from your cause at once, if you wish it."

"Nay, Sir Savaric," said John; "we did but jest, and will not let a miserable Bishop stand between our friendship. But here comes more wine; let us pledge each other."

"Right willingly, my liege," said Savaric, draining the cup that was handed to him.

"Stand not thus, De Mauleon," said John. "Sit thee down and join us at our revels."

"Nay, my liege," he replied; "this is no time for revels. We have a skilful and brave knight to contend with in D'Albini. I have taken every precaution for the night, and I now go to seek my couch, so as to be ready for the morrow."

"Fare thee well! De Mauleon," said John. "We will continue our revels, were it but to harass these rebellious monks."

Wending his way from the precincts of the Priory, Savaric entered the High Street and went direct to the dwelling of Nicholas Lethenard. By the order of Savaric, his servant had displayed his banner from an upper window; and on the outside of the house were posted a couple of sentinels to guard the building, and likewise to show the importance of the leader, who had chosen this place for his temporary abode.

Nicholas Lethenard welcomed his guest, and led him to an apartment upstairs, overlooking the High Street, where he caused Idonea to place refreshments before the knight.

Savaric did full justice to the viands that were set before him, at the same time regarding Idonea attentively, and glancing occasionally at Nicholas, who was busy writing at the farther end of the table.

When the repast was over, and Savaric found the servants had withdrawn, he said, "My friends, if ye can spare time, I would hold converse with you."

"Worthy knight," said Nicholas, "I have finished, and am at thy service."

"I am pleased to be quartered here with thee," said Savaric. "It will enable me to be a protection to you, while the siege of the Castle goes on."

"Gramercy! noble knight," said Nicholas. "To think that I should have lived to see the day when the Portreeve of the City of Rochester should require protection in his own dwelling!"

"Nay, Sir Portreeve," replied Savaric; "'twas not so much to thy goods and chattels that I alluded."

"To what else didst thou refer, sir knight?" asked Nicholas.

"Thou hast a daughter—the fair Idonea," replied Savaric. "Noticed thou the King's admiring glances at her this morning, when she handed him the wine?"

"I did, sir knight," said Nicholas; "but, surely, the King would not meditate aught against one of such humble degree as a poor citizen's daughter."

"Pish! thou knowest not John," replied Savaric. "He intends to ride through England serving friends and foes, as his captious fancy takes him, killing all who oppose him, and sparing neither maid nor wife who may please him."

"Then the saints protect us," groaned Nicholas; "for to whom else shall we look for protection?"

"Why, marry, to me!" replied Savaric. "I have both the power and the right to protect you."

"The power thou undoubtedly hast," said Nicholas; "but to thy protection we can claim no right."

"By our Lady!" replied Savaric, "how knowest thou that?"

"Who art thou, noble knight," inquired Nicholas, "that thou should'st claim it as a duty to protect us?"

"A knight, not altogether unknown to fame —Sir Savaric de Mauleon—brother to thy wife, and uncle to her motherless child."

"Brother!" said Nicholas, "protect my child from the machinations of the King, and thy sister will look down from heaven upon thee, and bless thee."

"Niece," said Savaric, "come hither and let me salute thy fair cheek."

Idonea embraced her uncle, who looked at her again, and said, "Thou art the image of thy mother. I saw the likeness when thou didst hand the goblet to the King."

"How didst thou learn of our relationship?" queried Nicholas.

"From the Prior, Helias, just before I met thee on the Bridge," said Savaric. "I also discovered that the Prior was an old comrade of mine, who knew my sister well. He was surprised to find her a resident of this city, when he believed that she had been drowned. Idonea, I must caution thee, also, about some of the roystering gallants who follow the King's banner. Lose not thy heart to any of them."

"Nay, brother," replied Nicholas; "have no fear on that head, for Idonea is betrothed to Robert Pende, the Captain of the City Guard."

"I am glad to hear of it," said Savaric. "I have both seen and conversed with him, and he pleased me."

CHAPTER XXI.

The Besieged.

A fortnight had elapsed since the arrival of King John at Rochester, and the beginning of the siege of the Castle. This time had not been wasted by his forces. Thrice had they attempted to storm the Castle ; but thanks to the enormous solidity and height of the walls, as well as the valour and military skill shown by the defenders, John practically was no nearer taking the Castle than on the first day of his arrival.

Within the Castle the knights and men-at-arms felt the utmost confidence, not only in the manner in which the walls were guarded, but also in the great skill displayed by William D'Albini.

On the walls had been erected immense engines for hurling huge stones down upon the assailants ; and every method for strengthening the Castle, that skill could devise, had been carried out.

D'Albini and De Cornhill were always on duty in turn. Theirs had been no idle task,

for ever and anon John and his leaders attacked first one part of the walls and then another ; and they would be frequently menaced at two or three different points at once.

It was after one of these attacks that D'Albini and Reginald were refreshing themselves, and Vynet was also present in attendance on them.

"By the mass!" said Reginald, "this has been a hardish tussle ; but we have beaten them back."

"It has, Reginald," replied D'Albini ; "and our men have behaved with great bravery."

"I should think they must be getting tired of these attacks," said Reginald.

"I hope not," replied D'Albini ; "for all the while they continue thus the Castle is safe. They have leaders of great skill amongst them, and we know not to what stratagem they will resort."

"We shall not be required to hold out long," said Reginald, "for ere this Fitz-Walter has learned of our being mewed up here, and, according to the tenor of his oath, will be soon advancing to our relief."

"I take a different view, Reginald," replied D'Albini. "Fitz-Walter is likely to leave us to our fate. I noted the scowling glance he

cast at me, on his discovering the amount of popularity that I had attained in the Tower, when all the soldiers wanted to follow me on an unknown quest."

"I did notice it, but did not attach any importance to it."

"Reginald, when thou hast been in all countries and had to study men's countenances, as I have done, thou wilt learn that the face is a true index to the feelings that are within."

"He may play us false," said Reginald. "We will, however, hold out as long as possible."

"I have no fear of the Castle being taken, all the time John pursues the same tactics," replied D'Albini; "but I am afraid that our provisions will not hold out a lengthened siege."

"How long, thinkest thou, that our provisions will last?" inquired Reginald.

"About a fortnight," replied D'Albini.

"Why not at once place the garrison on half rations? That would be better than being starved out entirely," said Reginald.

"I will call the men together, and explain matters to them," said D'Albini.

"It will be better to do so," replied Reginald; "and let them know that knights and men-at-arms will share alike."

It would be well if we could communicate with the Barons," said D'Albini. "If they were to send an army to attack John, we, too, could so worry his men from the Castle that they would be fairly caught in a trap."

"How can we let the Barons know?" asked Reginald.

"My lords," said Vynet, "I have been your messenger before. Let me again undertake the task."

"How dost thou propose to get clear of John's army?" said D'Albini.

"There is the secret shaft leading to the river. I am a good swimmer, and the tide will be full about ten o'clock to-night. I could float up the river, eluding their boats that are scattered about, and, when a safe point has been reached, I could land and make for Sir Reginald's house at Maidstone, where I should be able to get a horse, and borrow some dry clothing."

"Thy plan is good," said Reginald; "but thou wilt have to walk about seven miles in thy wet garments."

"That will not hurt me," replied Vynet; "I have been in worse plights than that."

"It is agreed, then, for thee to undertake the mission, Vynet," said D'Albini. "To-night, about an hour before the tide is full, thou shalt start on thy journey, and the tide will assist thee. Take this ring of mine. It will gain for thee the credence of the Barons."

"My lords, fear not but that I will inform the Barons how you are now situated," said Vynet.

D'Albini, Reginald and Vynet now went to the great courtyard in the centre of the enclosure; and D'Albini, putting his bugle to his lips, blew a blast, which quickly summoned the garrison of the Castle. As soon as they were assembled, the Governor addressed them.

"Comrades," he said, "I find that the provisions are running short, and we have not enough to last a fortnight longer. We will, therefore, all go on short allowance, to enable us to hold out as long as possible; for we have no quarter to expect from John and his mercenaries, though we have hopes that, ere we get to such extremities, the Barons will come, according to their oaths, to our rescue. Walter Vynet has offered to-night to elude the vigilance of the King's army, and then proceed to London to inform the Barons of our condition, and so hasten them on."

"Long live our noble Leader!" shouted the men. "We will hold out till the last."

The same night Vynet, dressed in a leathern jerkin and hose, armed only with a long dagger that was fastened to his belt, could be seen approaching the Water Tower, accompanied by D'Albini. Entering the Tower, they opened a small door in the farther side, and ascending a winding staircase, they came to a chamber in the solid thickness of the wall. In the floor of this room was an iron trap-door, while overhead, fixed in a massive beam, was a pulley with rope attached.

On raising the trap-door, a cold rush of air came up from the chimney-like cavity, nearly extinguishing the light in the lanthorn that D'Albini carried; while forty feet below could be heard the waters of the Medway dashing against the foundations.

"By the Mass!" said Vynet, "it sounds as if a legion of devils were tormenting the Medway into a fury."

"I grieve, Vynet," replied D'Albini, "to send thee on such a perilous journey."

"Tut! my lord," replied Vynet; "I shall arrive in London in safety."

Vynet tightened his belt, and loosened his dagger in its sheath; then, taking a firm grip of the rope, he swung over the dark abyss.

"Farewell! my lord," he said, as D'Albini lowered him into the river.

When the rope was slackened, D'Albini hauled it up, and, closing the trap, fastened it. He then made his way to the ramparts to see if he could discover Vynet; but the darkness was so intense that he could distinguish nothing on the river beneath.

CHAPTER XXII.

Vynet's Mission.

When Vynet was lowered, he found himself gradually being immersed in water till it reached his armpits, when he touched the bottom. Feeling his feet on the shore, he let go the rope by which he had been let down.

It was a chilly October night, and the waters of the Medway sent a cold thrill all over Vynet, as he stood there in the well-like bottom of the shaft, with the light of D'Albini's lanthorn casting a lurid gleam upon the surging waters below.

As D'Albini closed the trap, it left Vynet in utter darkness. He then groped his way along a short tunnel till he arrived at the archway, the apex of which rose about three feet above the water, which at full tide would completely cover it.

Standing there for a few seconds, he gazed around him. Away on the right loomed the Bridge, with the vast gap in the centre, partially illuminated by the fitful glare of the

watch fire that had been lit in the middle of the roadway ; while ever and anon the sentinel, pacing backwards and forwards, seemed for the moment to extinguish it.

In front of him and to the left, looking up the river, was one dark expanse of water, rushing wildly on, eddying and surging, and now resembling a miniature sea, upon whose bosom rode several vessels at anchor, dimly outlined in the darkness.

Breathing a prayer to the Virgin to protect him, Vynet silently plunged into the Medway ; and, swimming under water, he made for the centre of the stream, only rising to take breath, and again disappearing below the surface.

Proceeding in this way for some distance, he rose once more to take breath, when his head came, with a sudden thud, into contact with the side of one of the vessels. So severe was the blow that, unconsciously, he gave vent to a cry of agony. A man, who was on the look-out on deck, and who had been imagining all kinds of ghosts and spectres in the darkness, was so alarmed at what he considered something supernatural, that he made a rush into the cabin, firmly bolting himself in.

Vynet for a moment was compelled to hang on to the rudder of the vessel till he recovered

himself. He had seen the man run along the deck, and expected that he had gone to call the rest of the crew ; but, as no one appeared, he gathered courage, and, seeing a small boat moored to the vessel, he swam towards it, clambering over its side. With the speed of one who knows that every moment is of value, he quickly severed the rope by which it was fastened with his dagger, and let the boat glide with the tide up the river.

When he had got a safe distance from the vessel he took the oars, which, to his great joy, he found in the boat, and proceeded to pull up the stream.

About twelve o'clock he found himself at Maidstone, when, steering his boat in to the steps of De Cornhill's house, beneath the shadow of the stately church of the Virgin, adjacent, he stepped on shore. He then cast the boat adrift, and left it to float back with the tide, which had now turned.

Carefully he went round the house, but all was in darkness ; not a solitary light was to be seen. He tried every means of gaining admission, but all the doors had been carefully locked and barred, for these were times when it behoved everyone to see that their premises were carefully defended against unwelcome intruders.

Finding he could not gain admittance, and being thoroughly exhausted with his labours, he went to the adjoining church, and there, in the large porch, lay down upon the benches that were on either side of the doorway, soon falling into a slumber.

With the break of day Vynet arose from his wooden couch, and found that some of the household of De Cornhill were stirring. He at once communicated their lord's commands to them, and was furnished with some clothing, refreshment, and a horse, when he at once set off on the road to London.

After a few hours' riding, Vynet again entered London ; but how different was the city now. The brave citizens had heard of the siege of Rochester Castle, and were all under arms, presenting a very martial appearance, and looking like men who intended to defend their city to the last if John tried to attack them.

Vynet made straight for the Tower, and inquired for Archbishop Langton. He was soon informed that the Archbishop had gone to Rome, whither he had been summoned to a conference by the Pope, but that Fitz-Walter was in charge of the Tower ; so Vynet requested at once to be guided to his presence. (5) There he found, with Fitz-Walter, William

de Aumale and the Earls of Gloucester and Oxford.

"Ha, Vynet!" said Fitz-Walter. "Has John's army been routed by the valiant D'Albini, that we see thee here?"

"No, my lord," replied Vynet. "I am sent from Sir William D'Albini, to let thee know that he is closely besieged in the Castle of Rochester. His provisions are running short, and, if the Barons come not speedily to the rescue, the whole of the garrison will be starved out."

"I thought D'Albini, with the force he has with him, would be able to annihilate John's army," replied Fitz-Walter, with a sneer.

"Thou knowest not what an immense force John has mustered," said Vynet. "It would be impossible for Sir William to break through the vast hordes of mercenaries."

"If D'Albini, with all his force, is unable to get out of the Castle, how didst thou manage to get free?" inquired the Earl of Gloucester.

Vynet then related how he had escaped from the Castle, and described, also, the state of the City and Bridge, and the urgent need of a speedy rescue.

When he had finished, Fitz-Walter said, "Thou must stand in need of rest and refreshment." He then directed an attendant to

conduct Vynet to an apartment, and minister to his wants.

"We are bound," said the Earl of Oxford, "to go to the rescue of D'Albini."

"If the Barons were to rescue D'Albini," said William de Aumale, "he would get the credit of routing John's army; and, being of an ambitious nature, there is no knowing to what height his aims may lead him."

"I do not think it would be wise to go and meet John at the present time, and thus leave the rest of England at the mercy of our enemies," said Fitz-Walter.

"Nevertheless, we are bound by oath to go to his relief," said the Earl of Oxford.

"So be it," said Fitz-Walter. "In three days' time we will march to the rescue of D'Albini."

Later on, when Fitz-Walter and D'Aumale were alone, the latter so worked upon the jealous feelings which he knew Fitz-Walter entertained towards D'Albini, that, although he determined to march to Rochester, it was only on the understanding that, upon the slightest pretext, he would abandon the idea of rescue and leave D'Albini to his fate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

Idonea and the King.

King John had been superintending the various means employed for the attacks on the Castle, and was in no very amiable mood to find that its defenders made such a stubborn resistance.

Whilst he was thus engaged, a messenger from Hubert de Burgh, the Governor of Dover Castle, sought him out and placed in his hands a packet. Hastily breaking the seal, he learned that the force of Hugh de Boves, who had sailed from the coast of France, had been overtaken by a severe storm, which the mariners were unable to cope with, and that the whole of the ships had been wrecked and the men drowned, scarcely any escaping to tell the tale.

When John had mastered the contents of the letter, he swore many blasphemous oaths, and declared that though heaven itself should fight against him, yet he would accomplish the capture of Rochester Castle.

Robert Pende now approached the King, and said, "My liege, there is a knight whom we have detained at the East Gate of the City. He says that he comes from William de Aumale, one of the Barons, and craves speech with you."

"We will to the East Gate, and there interrogate him," said John.

Leaving the outworks of the Castle, John strode down the High Street to the East Gate, followed by Robert Pende.

Upon their arrival there, they found the knight in the guard-room, whilst his horse was being held by one of the citizens just within the gate.

"My liege," said the knight, "I am sent by my kinsman, William de Aumale."

"What has the traitor to do with us?" replied John, with a scowl.

"This much, that although apparently belonging to the Barons," said the knight, "he is anxious to be of service to you, if you will grant him pardon for having leagued with the Barons."

"If thou canst show that he means us fair," said the King, "and can aid us against the Barons, he shall be pardoned."

"I will remain as his hostage," replied the knight. "I have also some more important tidings for your ears alone."

At the command of John, the guard withdrew.

"We are alone," said the King. "Now for thy important news."

"My liege," replied the knight, "a messenger came to the Barons in London from D'Albini."

"Impossible!" said John. "No one can leave the Castle without our knowing it."

"What I state is true," quietly replied the knight. "It was one Vynet."

"Still that traitor!" roared John. "If ever he comes within reach of our sword, he shall die like a dog."

"This Vynet was lowered through some secret channel," continued the knight, "into the Medway at night, and managed to procure a boat, in which he rowed to Maïdstone, and there was furnished with a horse, which brought him to London."

"The villain has escaped us for a time!" cried John. "What news brought he to London?"

"That D'Albini is in fear of being starved out, and has called the Barons to his rescue.

They start for Rochester with an army to-morrow."

"This is serious news indeed," replied the King. "We shall have to meet them on the road and give them battle, for it would not be wise to let them besiege the City."

"My liege," said the knight, "if I might presume to advise, do not attempt to give them battle. The flower of the Barons' army will be there. Fitz-Walter is jealous of the popularity of D'Albini with the Barons, and D'Aumale has so fanned the flame, that Fitz-Walter only wants a pretext to turn back. Langton has been summoned to Rome by the Pope, under the pretence of a conference, but really to get him in his power, which trap Langton has fallen into."

"What pretext can be furnished to Fitz-Walter?" asked the King.

"Let some noble, who is not known to be with you, ride towards London," replied the knight. "He will be sure to meet the Barons, and then let him give a glowing account of your strength, and the way you are fortified here, and Fitz-Walter will be sure to turn back to London."

"We thank thee, Sir Knight," said John. "If thou wilt come with us, thou shalt enlist under our banner."

Walking up the High Street with the stranger-knight, leading his horse by the bridle, they were making towards the Castle, when, passing the dwelling of Nicholas Lethenard, John chanced to descry Idonea at the casement. Directing the knight where to go, he entered the house, and was shown into the room where she was sitting.

"My liege," said Idonea, "my father is out in the City somewhere."

"Sweet maiden," said John, "who told thee we wanted to see thy father?"

"I expected, by your coming hither, that you wished to see him," replied Idonea.

"Nay! 'tis thine own sweet self that we want," replied the King.

"My liege, what business can you have with me?" asked Idonea.

"What business but that of love could monarch have with such a comely subject?"

"My liege, hold not such discourse with me. I am the betrothed wife of Robert Pende, the armourer."

"What! think of a paltry citizen, when a King sues at thy feet?"

"You have a wife, my liege," said Idonea.

"Who could think of an absent Queen, whilst thou art present?" said John.

"My liege! once for all, understand that I am a true woman, and will not listen to your hollow proposal," replied Idonea, the colour rushing to her cheeks.

"Consider what we offer—the proudest place in the kingdom, instead of a life of insignificance," said John.

"Better a life in a lower sphere, with honour," replied Idonea, "than a position which is bought with dishonour."

"Nay, sweet maid," said John; "let us disperse these idle scruples."

"It is useless," said Idonea. "I refuse to be your sweetheart."

"And we have sworn thou shalt be," said the King.

Idonea was about to reply, when her father's footsteps were heard upon the stairs; and, directly afterwards, Nicholas entered the room. "My liege," said he, "I have but just learned that you deigned to honour my poor dwelling."

"We have been entertained by thy lovely daughter in thy absence," said John, with suavity; "and now, having rested, will once more return to the siege."

When John found himself in the street, he muttered a curse upon the untimely arrival of Nicholas, and inwardly resolved that Robert Pende should be disposed of, to make his conquest the more sure.

CHAPTER XXIV.

The March of the Barons.

Fitz-Walter kept his word, and marched, as he promised, on the third day from the Tower of London to the relief of William D'Albini.

It was a cold, dull day. Overhead the clouds were flying before the wind in large, dark, misshapen masses; and now and again a driving shower of rain would thoroughly saturate all who were exposed to it, making the roads heavy for travellers on horse or foot. The army of the Barons presented a grand and imposing array, as they marched along the road from London. Fitz-Walter, with D'Aumale, rode at the head of the army. The former was moody and silent, not at all like the leader of a gallant body of men, ready and eager for battle. This depression in the spirit of their leader had communicated itself to his followers; for nothing has so much influence, as the personal bearing of a leader, upon those who are under his command.

The men-at-arms marched along in a dejected manner, with none of the jokes and laughter that usually accompany a body of men on the march; and the frequent showers of rain tended to further increase the gloom that hung over them. Wet through and covered with mud, many a murmur and muttered oath were heard in the ranks as they made their way towards Rochester.

They had just passed through the town of Dartford, when they espied a knight fully armed, riding towards them, followed by his esquire and a small retinue. The knight wore over his armour a white tunic, on which was embroidered a black cross, showing that he was a member of the military religious order known as the Knights Templars. (6)

Courteously saluting the leaders of the Barons' Army, he was attempting to pass them, when Fitz-Walter cried out, "Halt! sir stranger knight."

"By what right am I stopped upon the highway?" asked the knight.

"By the right of might," replied Fitz-Walter. "We wish to know which side thou art for—the King's or the Barons'?"

"I have but just returned from the Holy Land," replied the knight, "and know nothing

of King or Barons. I am, as thou perceivest, a Knight Templar."

"Such being the case," said Fitz-Walter, "answer the questions I may put to thee; and, if satisfactory, thou shalt be permitted to pursue thy journey without delay."

"I will answer thy questions," replied the knight, "providing that thou requirest no information about the secrets of our Order."

"Thy name and title?"

"Osbert de Opham, a Knight of the Temple."

"From whence hast thou come?"

"I have but just returned from the Holy Land."

"Where didst thou disembark?"

"Folkestone."

"Whither art thou journeying?"

"To the preceptory of the Templars in London."

"At what towns on thy road hast thou stopped?"

"I stopped at Canterbury and Rochester."

"How didst thou cross the Medway?"

"Over Rochester Bridge."

"We have been told that the Bridge has been broken to prevent John from being attacked."

"There is a temporary platform laid over the chasm, by which myself and followers crossed."

"Did not John want to enlist thy services in his cause?"

"There was no need."

"Why? Explain thyself."

"Because he has such a large army with him; more than double thy force, I should judge."

"What news didst thou learn at Rochester? And how goes the siege of the Castle?"

"The siege is over; the Castle has surrendered."

"Surrendered!" said Fitz-Walter, with a smile.

"I learnt that King John and his followers stormed the Castle and gained the battlements. Sir William D'Albini was slain in a hand-to-hand encounter by Savaric de Mauleon, when the garrison, reduced by famine and worn out by continuous duty, surrendered themselves to John."

"When did this take place?"

"Yesterday morning."

"Knowest thou aught of John's movements?"

"It was rumoured in the city that the King intended to march immediately and subdue London."

"Dost thou think that is correct?"

"I cannot say. I know that there is a movement among the troops that betokens a march, —especially the repairing of the Bridge."

"I thank thee, Sir Osbert, for thy information," said Fitz-Walter. "Thou art now at liberty to continue thy journey."

"Having replied to thy interrogations," said Sir Osbert, "perhaps thou wilt deign to give me some information in return."

"Willingly," said Fitz-Walter.

"What is the next town from here? And how far distant?"

"Dartford, about a mile off."

"Then I will make for that town, stop there for the night, and then on to London with the morrow's dawn." Thus saying, with a graceful wave of the hand to Fitz-Walter and his staff, he rode on towards Dartford, where he put up at the principal inn. He directed his servants to mix with the Barons' army, and learn all they could from them upon their return to Dartford, as he felt sure they would retrace their steps and pass the night there, believing that he had succeeded in deluding them.

On the departure of the knight, William de Aumale said to Fitz-Walter, "What, thinkest thou, had better be done now? If we go on, we should just about reach the outskirts of Rochester by the evening, and possibly be caught in a trap laid by John."

"I think we had better follow Sir Osbert and return to Dartford, encamp there for the night, and place our men so as to guard against surprise from the King," said Fitz-Walter.

Vynet, who was riding near the Barons, had heard the questions of Fitz-Walter, as well as Sir Osbert's answers, and clearly foresaw that they would leave D'Albini to his fate. Yet he nevertheless determined to return with them to Dartford, and learn their final decision.

The Barons then made their way back to Dartford and took possession of the town, placing the men round about it, so as to guard all the roads by which an attack could be made.

How different was this camp to that (described in the opening of our story) by the banks of the silvery Thames, after the signing of Magna Charta! The weather then was beautiful, and the men were engaged in various pastimes and feasting. Now they were wet through to the skin, murmuring and

discontented, and the object of the expedition defeated. It was no wonder, therefore, that a feeling of gloom permeated the whole of the camp.

When the leaders had seen to the placing of their men for the night, they went to their Inn, there to hold a Council.

By a strange coincidence, this happened to be the very house that Sir Osbert de Opham had chosen for his quarters, and he had been shown into a small chamber. This room joined one of much larger dimensions, and was separated only by a thin partition of wainscoting, so that anyone in the smaller apartment could distinctly hear what was transpiring in the larger one.

It was to this larger chamber that the Barons were shown; and, as soon as the leaders were seated, they closed the door and commenced deliberations.

"Nobles and Knights," said Fitz-Walter, "we have made a retrograde movement to enable us, whilst guarding against surprise, to hold counsel together to decide what our future actions shall be. Whether we shall advance to Rochester and give battle to John; or return to London, so as to strengthen the garrison, should John attack us at that stronghold."

"Lord Barons," said De Aumale, "it is useless to go to Rochester. We have already been informed that D'Albini is dead, and the Castle surrendered. If we go there, we may find John strongly fortified; or, possibly, he may have evaded us, and, by making a detour to London, attack the capital in our absence."

"My lords," said another, "although clearly of opinion that we should have gone to the rescue of D'Albini, living, it were foolhardiness to go, now that we are assured of his death."

"Noble Barons, may I crave the honour of asking a question of this august assembly?" said Vynet. "How knowest thou that D'Albini is dead, and that the knight was truthful in his communication?"

"By the honour of knighthood which he bore, and the Holy Cross which he wore upon his breast," replied D'Aumale.

"Thou forgetest, my lord of Aumale," replied Vynet, "that I have recently come from Rochester, and know the exact state of things there. I am certain that Sir William D'Albini could have held out, at least, for a fortnight."

"My lords," said De Aumale, in an angry tone, "are we to bandy words with a renegade and a menial—to weigh his words against the

honour of a knight who has fought for the Holy Sepulchre ?"

"No !" shouted several of the Barons. "We have decided. Let us go back to London."

"It is agreed then," said Fitz-Walter. "By to-morrow's eve, we will be again within the walls of London."

At daybreak, the next morning, Fitz-Walter and the Barons were astir, busy marshalling their men, and were soon on their way back to London.

Osbert de Opham had heard the whole of their remarks at the council, and determined to stop in his chamber till after he had seen the departure of the Barons.

When the last portion of the army had gone, he hastily summoned his servants, and made his way back to Rochester to communicate the success of his deception to King John.

But who is that man standing in a disconsolate attitude, watching the departure of the troops, and even for a long time after the last rank of the Barons had disappeared from view, standing still in the same position, with his eyes fixed on the road to London ? It is none other than our old acquaintance, Vynet !

Suddenly he braced himself up, and seemed once more the man of action he really was. As he glanced up and down the road, he saw a

little troop leave the Inn and proceed towards the road to Rochester, having at their head Sir Osbert de Opham, the Knight Templar.

"It is even as I thought," he muttered. "Sir Osbert is a friend of the King's. The Barons are his willing dupes. D'Albini and his garrison are left to their fate through the treachery and jealousy of Fitz-Walter. But I must also go to Rochester by a circuitous route, and, when once there, find means to communicate with those within the Castle."

CHAPTER XXV.

Treachery and Devotion.

Osbert de Opham and his followers rode at a good round pace to Gravesend, where they stopped and gave the horses a rest, starting shortly afterwards on the road again to Rochester.

By noon they had reached Strood, and, riding on to the Bridge as far as the gap, Sir Osbert shouted to those on the other side to send a boat to the Strood Quay to ferry his party over the Medway.

He then rode back to the Quay, and waited till a heavy, flat-bottomed boat was pulled across the stream, on to which the knight led his horse with some difficulty, and was followed by his servants. When all were on board they were pulled over to the Town Quay. Disembarking, they re-mounted their horses, and rode to the outworks of the Castle in search of King John, whom they found completely accoutred in a suit of rich armour, walking from post to post, and watching the

Castle to see if he could discern a weak or unguarded point on which to make another attack.

Directly John saw Sir Osbert, his face was illumined with joy, and he said, "Thou hast succeeded in thy mission?"

"I have, my liege," replied Sir Osbert.

"Dismount quickly, and give us the result of thy journey."

Sir Osbert sprang from his horse, and gave instructions to his followers to retire to their quarters.

"My liege," he said, "you need have no fear of the Barons. They are completely deluded, and are now in full retreat to London."

"How hast thou managed to so completely hoodwink Fitz-Walter?"

"By the aid of this Templar's dress," said he, pointing to the cross upon his breast, "and a natural talent I have for lying."

"Did they attempt to illtreat thee?"

"No. I met them just below Dartford, and was pretending to pass them when I was stopped by Fitz-Walter, and I freely gave him the premature intelligence that you had taken the Castle, as well as a faithful account of the death of D'Albini, and of your intended march to London. The Barons no sooner heard this, than they returned to Dartford. It was

amusing to see the care they took to prevent surprise during the night. I was in the next chamber to that in which they held their council. There was but one voice that doubted my words, and he would have had the Barons continue their march to Rochester. De Aumale, however, effectually silenced him. I know his name, and, if ever he is revealed to me, I will slay him for so nearly overthrowing my plans."

"What was his name?" inquired the King.

"Vynet."

"The devil's malison on him!" growled John. "He seems to meet us at every turn, like an evil spirit. We swear we will kill him with our own hands if ever he comes within our reach."

"Then he has two enemies to face," said Sir Osbert.

"Did he return with the Barons?" inquired the King.

"I believe so," said Sir Osbert. "I watched the last of the Barons' army out of sight, and then rode to Rochester as quickly as possible."

"Thou shalt be rewarded for thy zeal in our behalf," said John. "Now away to the Priory and get some refreshment. We will see thee anon."

It is now time to return to Vynet, whom we left at Dartford. When he saw Sir Osbert making for Rochester, he saddled and mounted his horse, and rode slowly along the same road in deep thought, wondering how to communicate with those within the Castle, as well as to gain an entrance into the City undiscovered.

After riding about four miles in this meditative mood, he suddenly roused himself from his reverie, and, putting spurs to his horse, he made the animal change his walking pace to a gallop.

As he passed through Gravesend, he found himself overtaking Sir Osbert and his train. Instantly checking his horse, he noticed an inn, where he dismounted and called for a jug of ale, resting there for a time.

When he judged that he had given the knight and his party a sufficient start, he once more mounted his horse, and followed the main road till he came to the top of the hills overlooking the city, where he struck off to the right and made for Maidstone, which town he reached during the afternoon.

Vynet went to the house of Reginald de Cornhill, and was in deep conference with Sir Reginald's confessor for a long time; the outcome of which was, that the Confessor lent Vynet a monk's gown of the Benedictine

Brotherhood, to which Order he belonged. In this disguise Vynet started for Rochester.

Later in the day, a monk was to be seen wending his way along the road from Maidstone to Rochester, his cowl closely drawn over his head. The horse he rode was guided only by a halter, having neither saddle nor stirrups; yet it was plain that the rider was no inexperienced horseman.

The monk arrived at the top of the hill within sight of Rochester, when he dismounted, and, taking the halter from the horse's head, he shouted to the noble animal the word "Home!" and it immediately galloped back toward Maidstone.

He then walked down the hill, avoiding the City, till he came to the Hospital founded by Bishop Gundulf, and dedicated to Saint Bartholomew, for poor folk—lazars and lepers.

Entering the Hospital, the monk inquired if Helias, the Prior of St. Andrew's, was there, it having been his usual habit to visit the Hospital during the day. He was told that the Prior had not been to the Hospital since the siege of the Castle. The Bishop having gone away, he had deputed his duties to the Prior, which kept him within the Cathedral and Priory.

Leaving the Hospital, the monk proceeded to the East Gate, and was readily admitted as belonging to the Brotherhood.

Walking up the High Street, he made his way to the Priory and inquired for Helias.

Vynet (for it was he) was conducted to a chamber, where Helias received him.

"Father Prior," he said, "I have a message for thine ear alone."

Helias desired the monk, who had conducted Vynet, to withdraw. When they were alone, he threw back his cowl, displaying his features to the Prior, to whom he communicated all that had happened.

Helias listened patiently to the recital, and agreed to let Vynet take shelter at the Priory; and also to assist him, as far as possible, in the schemes which were proposed to him. Vynet then vowed that he would enter the monastery after the siege, and thus have the protection of the Church against John's persecution.

At night the Prior led Vynet into the Cathedral, and along the southern aisle of the nave, to a door beside the great west entrance. Unlocking the door, they ascended a narrow flight of stone steps, which brought them on to the roof of the nave.

Vynet carried in his hand a bow and arrow. The bow was an ordinary one, but the arrow

had been painted a bright red, whilst round the end nearest the arrow-head, bound tightly, was a piece of parchment.

The night was wild and gusty, the wind at times threatening to blow them over the battlemented parapet running round the top of the nave. Ever and anon the moon would break through the masses of wild, black clouds that were skimming along the sky.

Keeping well in the shade of the towers, Vynet and the Prior watched for the moon again to break forth—Vynet with the arrow drawn ready for discharging. Again the moon appeared, but only for a second or two ; yet, in that time, Vynet had sent the arrow straight up in the air with so true an aim, that it fell at the feet of a sentinel, pacing the battlements at the top of the great keep.

Vynet was then conducted by the Prior to a small chamber in the Priory. He also showed him a secret door that led to the room which John had appropriated for his own use on the memorable day when he forced the Priory gates, and pillaged the Cathedral and Monastery.

CHAPTER XXVI.

An Evil Conscience.

King John, when he learned of the retreat of the Barons' army, and the straits to which the brave defenders of the Castle were reduced, acted somewhat like a madman in his joy. He ran from leader to leader to impart the intelligence, with many a brutal jest. He gave vent to cheers, interspersed with yells, gesticulating wildly, and shaking his mailed hand at the Castle, which menace was answered by those within the Castle with a flight of arrows ; but, thanks to his splendid armour, they did not injure him.

At length, exhausted by the excesses to which he had been carried, he withdrew to the Priory, followed by the various knights, whose actual duty did not detain them round the walls of the Castle.

"Let us celebrate our triumph at the expense of the Priory," said John, once again seated in the Prior's chair. "A speedy surrender of the Castle, and death to its defenders !" said he,

holding aloft a goblet of wine. This toast was drunk with enthusiasm.

"After the fall of the Castle, what is the next step?" inquired a knight.

"On to London," replied the King, "enriching ourselves as we go, from our rebellious subjects."

"I shall be glad to leave Rochester," said the knight, "for we have taken all that is to be had in this City; the wine, also, is running short; the valuables have mysteriously disappeared; and I am bored with the women, who avoid us and treat us with scant courtesy."

"That reminds me," said John. "Let us drink to the health of the fair Idonea."

"We have no chance to judge of her beauty, since Sir Savaric de Mauleon has taken up his quarters at the portreeve's house," grumbled a young knight.

"We have seen her," said John, "but she has rejected our suit, which tends to inflame our desire for her conquest."

A minstrel, who was present, struck the strings of his harp, and commenced singing the lay of "Sir Launcelot and Princess Guinevere."

The mirth grew uproarious, and more than one knight was wagging his head with drunken

mirth. This carouse was continued well into the night, and many a seasoned drinker was fain to rest his head upon the festive board.

At a late hour King John, with unsteady gait, sought his chamber. His sleeping apartment was a large room with a stone-vaulted ceiling, and lighted by two small windows, looking in the daytime over the Priory garden. The massive oak bedstead was at the farther end of the chamber; and on the opposite side was a large open fireplace, furnished with fire dogs, on which cheerfully blazed huge logs of wood. From the ceiling, by a chain, was suspended a lamp, which faintly illumined the room.

Arrived at this chamber, John threw himself upon the oak settle beside the fireplace, his attendants undressing and then assisting him to his couch; this being a service they frequently had to render him, after he had been holding high revels.

John no sooner lay down than, overcome with drowsiness, he fell into a heavy, drunken slumber.

The attendants, as soon as they found that the King was soundly sleeping, instead of stopping and keeping guard, as their duty demanded, stole away to take a share of what the revellers had left.

But John's sleep was not the sleep of the just. He turned and moaned in a restless manner, indicating troubled dreams.

He dreamed of his father, whose death he had accelerated by his undutiful conduct. He stood before him, and saw the stern brow, and heard the curse which had been pronounced upon him. So realistic was the dream that he awoke with a start, and beads of perspiration stood upon his face.

"What a terrible dream!" he muttered.

Turning over, he soon fell asleep again. But this time he thought that he was in a lonely wood, and met a stranger-knight, who gave him battle and speedily conquered him. Placing his foot upon John's breast, with the point of his sword at his throat, while with his left hand he raised his visor, he displayed the well-known features of Richard, Cœur de Lion, who said, "Traitor and perjurer, what hast thou to say that I should slay thee not, and so rid the world of a tyrant?"

"Mercy!" cried John.

"Hast thou shown mercy," said Richard, "to my subjects? Coward that thou art, live, but seek a confessor and try to expiate thy crimes in a monastery."

Again John awoke with a start, and fear was plainly depicted on his countenance; but

this time it was not to slumber again. Sitting bolt upright in bed, his eyes starting from their sockets, he turned his affrighted gaze towards the side of the chamber, for there, in the darkest part, was a strange figure.

"The saints protect us!" gasped John, crossing himself. "Spirit, we conjure thee to tell us who and what thou art?"

"A spirit, as thou sayest," replied a hollow voice.

"What wantest thou with us?" tremblingly asked John.

"To call thee to repentance for thy evil deeds, and to tell thee that, unless thou makest reparation, thy place will be with the damned in purgatory."

"Good spirit, what has been done was through State necessity," said John.

"Was it a necessity to rise in rebellion against the King, thy father, and afterwards to rebel against the noble Cœur de Lion?"

"No; these were among the follies of youth," replied John.

"Were they the follies of youth that caused thee to persuade the Count of Angouleme to carry off his daughter, the Lady Isabella, from her husband, the noble Count de la Marche—to divorce thine own wife in order that thou mightest marry Isabella, in face of the menaces

of the Pope and the resentment of the injured husband ?"

"Good spirit, these are deeds that others have done the like before, and for which there is absolution."

"Thinkest thou the Church can grant absolution to a Prince who, even now, is resting in the Priory he has despoiled, and has treated God's holy servants with contempt ?"

"We will compensate them for the ill that we have done," replied John.

"The only compensation thou canst make, and which will be acceptable to heaven, is this—at once to raise the siege of yon Castle, and pardon its brave defenders."

"That will we never do, though all the powers of hell be ranged against us," said John, in an angry tone.

"Fiend ! tyrant ! parricide !"

"What meanest thou by parricide ?"

"Tell me what became of thy nephew Arthur ?"

"We know not," replied John.

"Liar ! Thou didst cause him to be removed from the Castle of Falaise by night, and taken to Rouen. Thou, with one follower, didst enter his prison chamber and stab him with thine own hands while he slept. By the secret stairs the twain of you took him, and cast the body,

heavily weighted with stone, into the Seine."(7)

"Thou art either the devil, or his imp, Vynet," said John.

"I am not the devil. I am Vynet!"

"Then have at thee," said John, springing out of bed, and, rushing at Vynet, seized him by the neck. So sudden was the movement that Vynet was almost overpowered; but John, weakened by continual debauchery, was no match for him. Holding John by the waist, and being an accomplished wrestler, despite his utmost resistance, he threw the King over his head to the other side of the chamber, where he lay like a log, stunned.

"Ha, viper!" said Vynet. "If I had not sworn to the Prior that I would do thee no harm, except in self-defence, I would kill thee."

Bending over the prostrate Sovereign, Vynet spurned him with his foot, when John uttered a groan. Vynet then retreated to the other side of the chamber, touched a spring which opened the secret door, and disappeared.

Slowly John recovered consciousness, and staggered to his feet. Glancing round the chamber, but not finding Vynet there, he rushed to the door, shouting to a man-at-arms on duty at the end of the corridor, and inquiring of him if he had seen anyone pass.

The man declared that he had not. John therefore, commanded him to summon the guard, while he hastily dressed himself, cursing and vowing vengeance.

He was soon ready, and then sent messengers to each of the gates, forbidding the guard to allow anyone to quit the City. The alarm-bell was sounded, and at once search was made in the Priory and its precincts, as well as in the City, for Vynet. He was to be captured, dead or alive.

The King himself led one search party over the Priory and Cathedral, roughly waking the sleeping monks in their cells, and compelling them to guide him into the different parts of the Priory. He threatened to hang the whole of them if Vynet escaped ; but they had never heard of Vynet, and thought the King was mad.

Nor were the citizens treated any better than the monks. They, too, were aroused without any ceremony, and their dwellings searched. Many an indignity and insult were committed by those conducting the search, and, on remonstrating, the citizens were simply told that it was by the King's command.

After an exhaustive search they gave it up, concluding that it was but a phantasy of the drunken slumbers of the King ; but John

believed that Vynet had been introduced by some of his servants, and secreted by them, and he therefore determined to watch them closely.

In the meantime daylight had appeared, thus dispelling any feelings of supernatural awe that had been felt by some during the night.

We will now return to Vynet, who, upon John showing signs of returning consciousness, disappeared through the secret door. Vynet was now in a small chamber, with another door on the opposite side.

This room was about five feet square, lighted by a series of small holes, which were cunningly concealed in the sculpture work and moulding of the larger chamber, not only giving a borrowed light, but enabling the occupant of this secret room to both see and hear all that was transpiring in the chamber which John occupied ; thus proving the adage that "Stone walls have ears."

Vynet, after seeing that the door was safely closed, watched John till he departed to institute his search for him, and then went to the other door and passed through into a passage-way, where there were several means of exit. Vynet opened a door communicating with a small, spiral staircase, having barely sufficient

room for a man to turn round. This he ascended, and from the narrow loopholes was enabled to see the commotion that was being made in the vain endeavour to find him.

Descending the stairs, he found the Prior awaiting him, and to him he gave an account of what had happened.

"Thou must not leave this hiding place while John is in the City," said the Prior, "or he will kill thee."

"Does anyone besides thyself know of this secret chamber near the King's?" asked Vynet.

"None but the dead, and they tell no tales. It is a secret that the Priors of St. Andrew alone know. When a Prior is elected, the keys are given him, and amongst them is one which opens a chest, to which none but the Prior is allowed access, and which contains reliquaries, as well as a written account of these passages, with full instructions how to open the doors. A command is given that no one else may know their secrets except in cases of extreme emergency."

"And I have sworn, before the shrine of Saint Paulinus, to preserve the secret," said Vynet.

"I will bring thee food and wine myself, so that thou canst watch the King when he deems himself alone, for that is the time he plans his

deeds, that bear not the light of day ; and, being forewarned, we may be able to thwart him."

The Prior pointed out a cell to Vynet where he could make himself comfortable for the night, and then returned to his own apartment.

On entering his chamber, the Prior knelt before a crucifix and prayed earnestly. Whilst he was thus engaged the door was thrown open, and John, at the head of a number of men, rushed in.

"My liege," said the Prior, rising, "what meaneth this violent intrusion ?"

"Hast thou seen Vynet ?" shouted the King.

"Who is Vynet ?" quietly inquired the Prior.

"We had forgotten, of course, that thou didst not know him," replied John. "He is a traitorous servant of ours, who is secreted somewhere in the Priory. Hast thou anyone in this chamber ?"

"No, my liege," said the Prior. "You are at liberty to search."

The followers of the King at once searched the chamber, but soon they were quite satisfied that Vynet was not there.

"Come," said John, "we are wasting time ; but we will unearth him yet."

CHAPTER XXVII.

False Hopes.

It is now time to return to the Castle, to see how its brave defenders prospered. The provisions were running very short, and the men were only half-fed, and worn out with incessant duty day and night, for John kept constantly harassing them. What with night attacks and false alarms, they had no rest; yet with all this, the men were cheerful, and determined to hold out to the last.

D'Albini and De Cornhill had been discussing the mission of Vynet, both being confident that he would reach London, but what the result would be neither cared to say.

It was during the night of Vynet's return to Rochester, that the sentinels of the Castle noticed from the walls a certain movement in the camp of their enemies, followed by the ringing of their alarm bell, which was at once a signal for the garrison of the Castle to fly to their posts.

D'Albini and Reginald hastily mounted to the walls to ascertain which part of the Castle was to be attacked ; but, after peering out into the darkness, they failed to find that any part was threatened in particular. They could hear the shouting, and see torches flashing about, but could discover no reason for the commotion.

As the confusion increased, the men-at-arms within the Castle commenced cheering, being under the impression that the Barons had arrived, and were making a night attack upon the City.

Some of the younger knights desired to make a sortie into the City to attack John's troops ; but D'Albini was too experienced in such matters to allow anyone to venture outside the walls. He only allowed them to worry the besiegers as much as possible, by means of the archers and the huge engines for hurling stones.

All through the night D'Albini kept his men at their posts. The whole garrison were in a state of excitement, expecting every moment to hear the clash of arms and the battle cry of the Barons. Thus they anxiously waited for daylight.

With the grey dawn of day they looked in vain for the Barons' army around the walls of

the City ; and not finding them, as they fully expected, their hopes of a speedy relief were shattered.

D'Albini and Reginald, after taking a fresh survey of their enemies, were utterly at a loss to comprehend the meaning of the strange commotion that had taken place in John's camp during the night.

Soon their attention was attracted by one of the men on the top of the Keep, who beckoned them to come up.

D'Albini and Reginald (his lieutenant) ran to the Keep, and up the winding staircase till they reached the battlements at the summit, when D'Albini said to the man, "Hast thou seen the Barons' army approaching ?"

"No, my lord," he replied; "but I have just noticed yon arrow. It is painted red, and there is something bound round it. I thought thou wouldst wish to see it at once."

D'Albini crossed to the spot, and, picking up the arrow, he cut with his dagger the thong that bound the parchment round the arrow-head. "Ha !" said he, "'tis from Vynet. Let us retire, and peruse its contents."

They descended from the battlements to the Barons' Hall, where D'Albini, in a low voice, read the missive from Vynet.

"My lord, thy fears are realised. The Barons, "after mustering their forces, marched as far "as Dartford, where they met a Knight of the "Cross, calling himself Sir Osbert de Opham, "whom they questioned. He told them that "Sir William D'Albini was killed by Savaric "de Mauleon in an attack on the walls; that "the garrison of the Castle had surrendered at "discretion; that the King was putting his "forces in motion, and was marching to attack "London. Fitz-Walter stopped at Dartford, "after strongly posting his men to avoid being "taken by surprise. A Council was held, when "I tried to prove that the knight's communi- "cation was false; but the Baron de Aumale "overruled what I said, preferring to take the "knight's word before mine. The Barons re- "turned the next morning to London. After "their departure, Sir Osbert came from his "hiding place, and rode rapidly to Rochester "to give John the intelligence. I came to the "City later, disguised as a Benedictine monk, "and am now secreted in the Priory. Should "I glean any important news, another arrow "shall be my messenger.

"Farewell, my lord,

"VYNET."

"This is indeed a gloomy outlook," said D'Albini, after he had read the letter—

"deserted by the Barons, a relentless foe at our gates, and no provisions within."

"Fitz-Walter is a coward," said Reginald, angrily, "but we will hold out to the last; and future ages, when hearing the recital of the siege of Rochester Castle, will speak of him with infamy; but we shall be commended for doing our duty as faithful knights."

"I would wager that Vynet had something to do with last night's commotion in the City," said D'Albini.

"I quite believe it," replied Reginald, "knowing Vynet's deep feeling of revenge against John."

"It is my opinion that we shall never leave this Castle alive," said D'Albini. "Therefore, our horses will be useless to us; we had better have them killed to eke out our provisions." (8)

"I shall be sorry to see mine old war-horse, that has carried me through so many dangers, killed to be eaten," replied Reginald. "Yet I cannot see those brave fellows starve; so the horses must go."

"Now we shall find the siege has really begun," said D'Albini. "What we have experienced is mere child's play."

"Let them try; they shall find us ready to die at our posts," said Reginald.

"They will now be finding some other method to subdue the Castle," said D'Albini. "Having no fear of the Barons, they will push on the siege with more vigour."

"I have great faith in these massive walls," replied Reginald. "What I fear more is starvation."

"From this time we shall have to live and sleep upon the battlements, for we shall find they will give us very little rest," said D'Albini.

"They certainly are strengthening our hands," said Reginald, "by the constant cry of 'No quarter to the rebels!' Our men know what to expect, and will fight to the last."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

Undermining.

Once more within the Chapter Room we find assembled King John and his mercenary leaders ; but it was for no drunken orgies this time. The King presided at the head of the board, to take counsel with his leaders as to the best means they could suggest for bringing the siege to a climax.

"We have now been many weeks before yon Castle," said John, "and have made no impression upon its solid walls, nor yet upon its defenders ; but we know they must be starving. The Barons have retreated to London upon the report reaching them that we were going to attack their forces, and we have nothing, therefore, to fear from them. Our royal wish is to take the Castle, and kill all its defenders as speedily as possible. We will spare none of the rebels. You are invited to give us your ideas as to the best method to obtain our end."

"A night attack at the most assailable point," said Sir Folkes de Breaute.

"That has already been tried," replied John.

"But they have lost many men since that attack, besides being weakened by want of food and rest," urged Sir Folkes.

"We shall lose too many men by a night attack," said Sir Savaric de Mauleon, "and make no impression upon the walls."

"Why not offer good conditions if they will agree to surrender?" said Sir Peter de Mauley.

"Never!" interrupted John. "They shall die."

"Nay! my liege, hear me to the end," said Sir Peter de Mauley. "When they are in your power, do as you list. There is no need to keep faith with rebels."

"That plan is better, and suits us," said John.

"But it would not be honourable," said Savaric de Mauleon. "A knight's word, when once given, should be held inviolate to friend or foe."

"If thou wilt object to every scheme that is brought forward," said John, with a scowl, "perhaps thou canst furnish us with a better."

"I can, my liege," replied Savaric calmly.

"What is it?" asked John.

"That of undermining the walls," replied Savaric.

"It would be next to impossible," said De Breaute. "The moat is wide and deep, and the pitch and stones that are hurled down upon us would render us unable to proceed with our work."

"We also think thy plan is impracticable," said John.

"Your pardon, my liege," replied Savaric. "I am quite willing to give you my plan, on one condition."

"Name it," said John.

"That, when the Castle is taken, you will not put to death the brave knights who have so nobly defended it."

Whilst De Mauleon was making this request, the countenance of the King underwent one of those sudden changes for which he was noted. A frown gathered on his brow, and his face became livid, and assumed the appearance of a fiend. It was a moment or so before he could control his anger and speak; and then he uttered a string of oaths, and declared that his cry was, "No quarter to the rebels!" and so it should continue to the last.

Savaric de Mauleon awaited the finish of this outburst of temper, calm and unmoved,

his deeply-furrowed countenance wearing that look of fixed determination which brave men alone can assume in the face of danger.

"Inform us of thy plan, we command thee, on peril of thy life!" thundered John.

"You forget that I am no subject of yours," calmly replied Savaric. "My life has been in more jeopardy ere this. King John, I fear not your threats!"

"Seize him!" shouted John.

As soon as John had given this order, Savaric pushed over the heavy oaken table at which he had been sitting, forming it into a barrier; and, placing his back against the wall of the Chapter Room, he drew his sword and stood at bay.

John turned pale when he saw the resolute stand that Savaric made against his order, and that no one ventured to execute it.

"How now?" said John. "Have ye all turned cowards? Seize him! We command you!"

"Your brother Richard, of the lion heart, would not have had to utter a command twice," tauntingly said Savaric. "Be courageous, and arrest me yourself."

"Summon the guard!" cried John. "Are we to be bearded in our own kingdom?"

"Stay!" said Savaric, in a stern tone. "The first man, who attempts to leave this room, dies! My liege, you have given your commands; now I will give mine. I withdraw myself and force from the siege of this Castle, and command the noble knights, who follow my banner, and those who hold the same opinion as myself, to follow me."

The majority of the knights at once rose, and were making for the door of the Chapter House, thus showing John his weakness, and the danger he ran by offending one of his principal supporters.

"Come back, Sir Savaric," said John. "We spoke hastily. Considering the time we have spent against this Castle, it raises our anger every time we behold its walls. Thou canst imagine how we felt when thou cravest a pardon for them."

"I asked you not to pardon them," said Savaric. "What I required was, that you should not put them to death. We may meet with reverses yet at the hands of the Barons, who, judging from D'Albini and his followers, are brave men. Then what terrible reprisals would they inflict on us, in case of the fortune of war changing."

A murmur of approval followed this speech.

"We promise, if the Castle is taken through thy means, we will not kill them," hissed John.

"You must swear not to kill or injure them, but only to detain them as honourable captives," said Savaric.

"We swear to do them no harm," mournfully said John, kissing a small crucifix he wore.

"Noble knights, bear witness. The King has sworn," said Savaric. "I will accomplish my part, and trust to the King's oath for the performance of his."

"Now let us have thy plan," said John, impatiently.

"My plan is to undermine the walls of the Castle at the south-east angle."

"Why the south-east angle?" asked John.

"That is the nearest point to the great Keep."

"Dost thou propose to cross the moat by means of a bridge?"

"No; a bridge could be easily broken. I shall require all the waggons that can be found. Just beyond the City walls let chalk be dug, and conveyed to the edge of the moat and thrown in, thus making a causeway over which any number can pass with safety."

"Let it be so; but we shall experience great danger from the missiles that will be cast upon us from the walls. Hast thou any remedy for that?"

"Have you ever heard of a 'sow'? I do not mean one of nature's making."

"No, we have not," said John. (9) "Pray explain thyself."

"It is a huge framework of wood, with rounded top, covered with untanned hides of leather; the interior, being hollow, forms a shelter for the men engaged. This is pushed forward to the foot of the walls, and, with hammers and crowbars, the work of undermining goes on; so that whatever may be thrown from the walls above upon the sow beneath, it is perfectly harmless to those working under the covering."

"Hurrah!" shouted several of the knights, "the castle is ours!"

"'Tis a grand plan," said John. "Thou, Sir Savaric, shalt take charge of the work, as thou dost understand it. Early to-morrow morning we will commence operations. We will personally command the knights and men-at-arms, and, by false attacks, draw the defenders to the other parts of the walls."

Later in the day John sent for Robert Pende, and, upon the captain making his appearance,

he addressed him in a most condescending manner.

"Well, Sir Captain!" said he, "thou and thy comrades have behaved in a manner that is highly satisfactory; so that we intend giving thee a chance to win distinction."

"My liege, I thank you. We have but done our duty," replied Pende.

"We are going to pursue a different course of tactics. The Castle is to be undermined," said John, "and there is no doubt but that, when D'Albini sees the danger, he will endeavour to make a sortie from the Barbican. We intend giving to thee and thy men the task of keeping them within the Castle. There will be some of our own immediate followers near to thy men, and, if necessary, they will be ready to give them support."

"My liege, I will undertake the task to the best of my ability," replied Pende.

"Do so, and thou shalt be well rewarded," said John. "Thou mayest think it strange that we select thee in preference to the knights we have with us. We know thee to be brave; and when the defenders of the Castle see only a body of citizens, whom they may be tempted to think lightly of, they will charge down the hill, only to find they have fallen into an ambuscade."

"Fear not, my liege; we shall give a good account of ourselves," replied Pende. "We will keep them within the Castle, or die if we fail."

"Farewell, worthy captain!" said John. "Make every preparation for the morrow."

King John then desired one of his attendants to send Sir Osbert de Opham to him.

Whilst waiting for Sir Osbert, John paced the chamber with a moody brow and scowling face, muttering, "Ha! ha! that fool of a citizen captain has fallen willingly into the trap prepared for him."

"Sir Osbert de Opham," announced the attendant.

"Welcome! Sir Osbert," said John. "We have sent for thee to undertake a task for us."

"Give me your commands, my liege," said Sir Osbert. "I am ready to do your behest."

"To-morrow we commence undermining the walls of yon Castle. We have given Robert Pende, the Captain of the City Guard, the post opposite the Barbican of the Castle. There is no doubt in our mind that, when the besieged discover what we are doing, they will endeavour to make a sortie. We therefore desire to place thee next to Pende's forces; and, if thou seest him pressed, make as if going to

his assistance with thy men, but manage so as to hem him in, making retreat impossible."

"But supposing I find that they are getting beaten?"

"Press on just the same," said John. "So long as Pende falls, we shall be satisfied."

"It is, then, the death of Pende that you require?" said Sir Osbert.

"Yes."

"May I inquire your motives? Has he shown any signs of siding with the besieged?"

"No. On the contrary, he is very zealous in our cause; but he stands in our way. We have proffered our suit to Idonea; and, forsooth, she has cast this low-born citizen in our teeth. She shall be ours, most likely willingly, when she knows that Pende is dead; but, with or without her consent, we have sworn to possess her."

"My liege, you can count upon me," replied Sir Osbert.

CHAPTER XXIX.

The Sortie.

The besieged were now on a very short allowance of food; and, to tantalise them, John had several oxen roasted whole within sight of the brave defenders of the Castle, the savoury odours of which permeated the atmosphere for a considerable distance. The half-famished sentinels upon the walls looked with eager, longing eyes at the oxen roasting and spluttering below them. They could not help contrasting the appearance of good cheer in the enemy's camp with their own meagre fare, which consisted of a small piece of bread and horse-flesh, washed down by copious draughts of the brackish water of the Castle well. Yet, with all these privations, there was no mutinous talk among these brave and resolute men.

D'Albini was finishing his mid-day meal, which, like that of the men-at-arms, consisted of horse-flesh, and was wiping his dagger, which he had been using for cutting up his dinner, when Reginald came in hastily. "Come

up to the battlements and see what they are doing," he said. "In faith, I cannot make it out."

D'Albini quickly ascended to the top of the tower, and from there beheld a number of waggons of all makes and dimensions, from those of ancient pattern with solid wooden wheels, to the lighter-built ones of John's reign, the wheels of which were made with spokes.

This long array of carts and baggage-waggons (for everything upon wheels, and capable of being propelled, had been appropriated, not only in the City but in the neighbourhood) went out of the south gate of the City for a distance of about four hundred yards, and then stopped. With the carts came a number of men, armed with picks and shovels. When the carts were stopped close to the banks, which nature had formed in terraces sloping down to the water's edge, the men set to work to dig the chalk; and, standing on the bank above the carts, it was easy to throw the chalk into them. A large number of men were engaged in this occupation, so that in a remarkably short time the carts were filled.

D'Albini and Reginald, with several of the knights, who had gathered on the battlements, watched the vehicles pass out of the gate, and

the process of filling them ; and many a conjecture was hazarded as to the meaning of this strange procedure. Slowly the carts returned to the south gate, groaning and creaking, loaded to their fullest capacity.

Rumbling on to the very edge of the moat, they shot load after load into it. Then, and not till then, did the besiegers know what their enemies were doing.

D'Albini commanded all the archers, who could be spared with safety from other parts of the walls, to keep up a constant flight of arrows on those who were filling up the moat.

A cross-bowman, who was looking over the battlements, now said to D'Albini, "My lord, behold the tyrant !" pointing at the same time to the well-known figure of King John, who was cautiously reconnoitring the defences of the Castle.

"Well !" said D'Albini, "it is the King ; what wouldest thou ?"

"Shall I take him off by thy leave ?" said the bowman, suiting the action to the word, and adjusting a steel bolt to the bolt-string.

"Shall I despatch this swift messenger to the tyrant ? Only give the command."

"Nay, God forbid !" said D'Albini, raising his hand to check the rash attempt. "Forbear ! it is the King !"

"Very well, my lord," said the man, with a disappointed air; "be it according to thy pleasure. Only, methinks, that were the tyrant in thy place, and thou on the outworks yonder, there would be no 'God forbid!' 'Tis a fine target."

"Nay, nay; no more of this. Keep thy bolts for better uses. We must not do as the King would do, nor as the King has done. He is the anointed of the realm; and, if his deeds have ill corresponded with his duties, we shall not mend things by an act of treachery."

"True, my lord," said the bowman, but still keeping his eye on the King, and raising the weapon instinctively to his eye; "and yet 'tis the last chance; and, when the horse-flesh fails us, the saints have mercy upon the garrison."

"Let us abide the worst," said D'Albini. "Brave hearts, and the favour of Heaven, are a match for the King and all his army. Besides, I expect Fitz-Walter and the Barons will raise the siege."

"They are right tardy in their march; almost two months have they loitered thus."

"Nay; methinks I see them even now descending yonder hill. Seest thou aught?"

"I can see nothing but the King and this cross-bow," replied the man; "and now,"

added he, despairingly, "my chance has gone —'tis lost!"

"No matter," said D'Albini; "thou hast more honourable work before thee; for see, they prepare for a new assault—the ladders are out. To thy post, and I to mine. The event is with God, not with King John."

"Maybe so!" said the staunch bowman, "maybe so! but, with King John, I wot, is neither sickness nor starvation. His host, I warrant me, have all breakfasted this morning; whilst some, whom I could name, have been three days under arms, with little better cheer than the Castle well provides."

"Too true!" said D'Albini, "too true! We must fast as well as fight; but to-night, please God, even to-night, the Barons may arrive, the siege may be raised, and thou and thy brave companions shall then sup from the King's larder. What sayest thou to that, Hugo?"

"My appetite is right keen, my lord; and my thirst not a whit behind my appetite."

"Well then, courage! and see what God will send us."

"Amen!" said the bowman; "and never doubt my courage when D'Albini commands. And yet, had this little bolt been sent home, much blood, methinks, would have been

spared. But no matter now, the die is cast; and, if once caught by the tyrant, yonder stands the gibbet! So once more, here goes!"

"Ay, by my troth, and a right good aim!" said D'Albini. "Thou hast hit the first man between the joints of his harness; he tumbles dead from the ladder. This is the right game; so once more, 'God and freedom!' be the word."

"God and freedom!" responded the bowman; and herewith the closing horrors of the siege began.

Reginald, in a hasty conference with D'Albini, suggested the advisability of making a sudden sortie out of the Barbican, against which was posted only the Civic Guard; and, by taking a strong body of men with him, he counted upon being able to make a rush, capture the carts and back them into the moat, which, being deep, would prevent them from being recovered.

D'Albini agreed that it was a chance worth trying; and Reginald claimed the privilege of heading the sortie, to which D'Albini agreed.

He soon had a number of men ready to follow him. D'Albini, leaving the walls in charge of a knight, descended to the courtyard, and, with his men, stood ready to cover

the retreat of Reginald upon his return, should his help be needed.

Suddenly the drawbridge was lowered, the gates swung open, and, with a rush, Reginald dashed down the hill, followed by his men.

Wild as was the charge, it had not taken Pende by surprise. He had seen the lowering of the drawbridge, and had placed his men to advantage as soon as the bridge was down. Calling to the citizens to follow him, he ran up the hill, where they met in the centre, and a furious onslaught took place. The citizens held their own, and it was doubtful which would have gained the advantage; but, just at this time, Sir Osbert put his followers in motion, and, driving onward the rear ranks of the citizens, they pushed the combatants so closely together that they had not room enough to use their weapons. Besieged and besiegers were so mixed together that they resembled nothing but a disorganised crowd, surging and swaying, shouting and cursing.

Reginald, finding he could make no headway against the overwhelming number of his opponents, reluctantly gave the command to retreat into the Castle.

Falling back to the Barbican, they were followed by the citizens, who were being driven forward by those behind.

D'Albini had witnessed the charge from the walls, and ordered the archers to do their utmost against those who were driving the citizens forward. He then rushed to the gates, and just as Reginald had got through, and several citizens with him, D'Albini and his knights made a furious charge, and managed to drive back their assailants and close the gates of the Barbican.

By the splendid accuracy of the archers, almost every arrow told with deadly effect. The drawbridge was now clear, and was at once raised, and not till then did D'Albini feel the Castle was safe.

Upon looking round, they discovered just within the gates the Captain of the Civic Guard, lying upon the ground, and apparently dead.

Reginald quickly recognised Pende, and, bending over him, raised him to his feet.

Pende slowly opened his eyes, and, looking at the faces around, all of whom were strange to him, he inquired, "Where am I? What has happened?"

"Thou art within the walls of Rochester Castle," replied D'Albini; "and thy prediction has come true. We have met as brave men should, but the fortune of war has gone against thee."

"Then I am a prisoner?"

"Yes; but I pledged thee my knightly word that, if ever it was in my power to be of assistance to thee, I would render it. Give me thy word that thou wilt not attempt to escape, and thou shalt be free to wander about the interior of the Castle as it may please thee."

"I give thee my word, and surrender my sword," said Pende; "at the same time thanking thee for thy courtesy."

"Nay, keep thy sword. I trust thy word alone," replied D'Albini. "Art thou wounded?"

"No, my lord; merely stunned by the blow of a mace. My steel headpiece saved my life."

"Come to the Keep; I would fain talk with thee," said D'Albini, leading the way.

Arrived at the Barons' Hall within the Keep, D'Albini desired Pende to seat himself, for he was still giddy from the blow he had received.

"Art thou still faithful to John?" asked D'Albini.

"Yes, my lord."

"Yet, in thine own interest, thou wilt not mind answering a few questions that concern thyself?" said D'Albini.

"Propound thy questions, my lord."

"How camest thou to be posted with thy men opposite the Barbican?"

"By the King's order, given to me personally," replied Pende.

"Hath John any cause for enmity towards thee?"

"I know no reason for his enmity," replied Pende. "Wherefore askest thou these questions?"

"I saw from the Barbican that, when thou and De Cornhill met, another body of men, led by a knight, advanced and treacherously drove thy men forward, not even giving them room to use their weapons. Had it not been for my archers, thou wouldst have been in a worse plight, for the archers caused them to retreat."

"I cannot understand it," said Pende.

"I can see that, for some reason or other, John wishes for thy death. Take my advice, and do not show thyself upon the walls, and they will then imagine that thou art dead."

"John has acted a traitorous part towards me, I feel convinced," replied Pende. "I will tell thee all I know of his plans. They are filling in part of the Castle moat, to enable them to cross to the foot of the walls, which they will undermine. The carpenters of the City are busy making a huge frame, which they are covering with raw hides, to protect the men engaged in that work. They will

begin to undermine opposite the spot where they are filling in the ditch."

"Then that is the post of danger," replied D'Albini.

"Here is another arrow from Vynet, which had overshot the mark and was found in the courtyard," said Reginald, as he entered the room breathlessly. "It must have been despatched last night."

D'Albini took the arrow, and, cutting the thong, read as follows :—

"Treachery is again at work. I overheard "John giving instructions to the Captain of "the City Guard, to prevent a sortie from the "Castle. Afterwards, in his private chamber, "when he thought no one else was near, he "commanded Sir Osbert de Opham to drive "the citizens—especially Robert Pende, their "captain—on to destruction, giving, as his "reason for so doing, that, if Pende could be "disposed of, Idonea, the Portreeve's daughter, "would listen to his vows more willingly. "But, willingly or not, John swore she should "be his." "VYNET."

When D'Albini had finished reading the missive, Pende, who had started up with his hand upon his sword-hilt, reeled and fell to the ground. The blow which he had received,

and the danger that menaced Idonea, had been too much for the worthy armourer.

The knights raised him up and had him carefully attended to, whilst everything was done to alleviate his sufferings. They then repaired to the battlements again, to watch the progress their enemies made in filling in the moat.

CHAPTER XXX.

Trapped.

Great was the dismay of the citizens, after their repulse, to discover that their Captain was not with them. Several returned, as far as the Barbican, to see if he had been thrown down in the melée. They could find no trace of him. He had been seen when they were under the Barbican, but, as to his ultimate fate, they were in great doubt. If he had been captured alive within the gates, they knew that death would be the penalty, as the cry of the besiegers was "No quarter!"

Nicholas Lethenard, the worthy Portreeve of the City of Rochester, learned the tidings with sorrow, nothing doubting but that Pende had fallen in the fray; and he therefore hastened to his dwelling to break the news, as gently as possible, to his daughter.

Upon his arrival there, he found Idonea had already been informed of the report—for bad news always fly apace—and she was bowed

down with grief. She threw herself into her father's arms and wept.

"My daughter," said Nicholas, "I have but now heard the tidings. I will go and inquire of those taking part in the fray, and try to find out the truth."

"Go, my father," replied Idonea. "If anything has happened to Robert, it will break my heart."

It was now late in the afternoon, and a deep mist was gradually falling over the town, changing daylight into darkness. Outside the Portreeve's house were gathered small knots of the inhabitants, discussing the disappearance of Pende, who was both beloved and respected by the inhabitants at large.

While the citizens were thus engaged, a monk left the Priory gates and walked down the High Street to the abode of Nicholas Lethenard. Upon reaching the dwelling, he inquired for Idonea, and was shown to the room where her father had left her.

"Daughter," said the monk, "I have come to bring thee consolation."

"Alas, father, what consolation canst thou give me when my betrothed is dead in yon Castle?"

"Daughter, the consolation that I would give is for thine ear alone," replied the monk.

Idonea then desired the neighbours, who were present, to withdraw.

"Now, father, we are alone; what wouldst thou with me?"

"I am the Chaplain of Rochester Castle."

"How camest thou to leave the Castle?"

"By command of Sir William D'Albini, the brave governor."

"Tell me, knowest thou aught of Robert Pende?" cried Idonea, in a voice of anguish.

"I do. He is now a prisoner in the Castle. He was wounded, and fell within the gates of the Barbican just as they were closed."

"Then he is alive," said Idonea, joyfully.

"Alive, but dangerously wounded. He is under my care, as I have a knowledge of drugs and medicines. The crisis will be at midnight. He constantly calls for thee, and thy presence alone is required to quiet him, and then there would be a chance of his recovery."

"Oh, that I could but enter the Castle!" cried Idonea.

"Nothing is easier, if thou hast courage," said the monk.

"For Robert's sake, I would be brave even unto death," she replied. "Tell me how to get there."

"Thou art a brave damsel. As I anticipated thou wouldst go, I have brought with me a

monk's gown for thee to put on over thine own. Draw the cowl well over thy face, and, in the deepening twilight, thou wilt pass for one of the brotherhood."

"How are we to reach the Castle?" asked Idonea.

"There is a subterranean passage leading from the Priory of the blessed Saint Andrew to the Castle. The passage runs under the moat, and communicates with the dungeons of the Castle. None but the monks knew of its existence. I informed the governor of the Castle, who, at the intercession of Sir Reginald de Cornhill, gave permission for me to come for thee." (10)

"I am ready, holy father, to follow thee to the Castle."

The monk led the way out of the dwelling, and, bestowing his blessing as he passed on the groups of citizens, entered the gates of the Priory, closely followed by Idonea, in the garb of a monk.

They passed into the Cathedral by the north door, and found the transept but dimly lighted by the candles burning on the altar of St. Nicholas. Crossing to the south transept, they entered the chapel of St. Edmund. In this chapel was a door leading to the cloisters. They had just arrived at this door when the

Prior (Helias) entered, and, greeting them, he hastily passed on.

The monk guided Idonea to one of the apartments John occupied, and, requesting her to be seated on a bench near the fire, he said, "Daughter, so far we have come in safety. In this room thou mayest rest quietly, while I go and see if the way is clear to the secret passage, for many of John's knights are within the Priory. I may be gone some time, but that will depend on circumstances. Do not be alarmed; thou art quite safe."

The monk left the chamber, gently locking the door after him, and, putting the key in his pouch, he hastily traversed the Cathedral to the western door. Emerging from the sacred fane, he made his way to that part of the moat which was being filled up with chalk.

By the side of the moat stood John, his arms folded, watching the chalk being thrown into the water. The night was dark, but, by the aid of torches and watch-fires, the work still went on. In the distance were heard carpenters, and other craftsmen, busily engaged in making the curious "sow." So much interest was manifested in its manufacture, that all those, who had nothing better to do, crowded round and watched the busy workers.

The monk approached the King, and touched him lightly on the arm, causing John to start from his reverie. "How now, monk? What means this familiarity?" said John, nervously clutching the hilt of his sword.

"My liege, I came to call your soul heavenwards."

"Ah, thou canting hypocrite! What meanest thou?"

"That, if you follow me, I will conduct you to an angel's presence."

"By my father's soul, I believe the shaveling is mad," muttered John.

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the monk, throwing back his cowl, and displaying the well-known features of Sir Osbert de Opham.

"Sir Osbert!" said John, in amazement.

"Yes, my liege. I have caged the bird, who is now awaiting you in your chamber. Here is the key."

"Sir Osbert, thy reward shall be great," said John, joyfully. "We will keep her waiting no longer."

"And I will go and pay my attentions to the wine cup, to wash the senseless tattle, that I have been obliged to utter, from my throat."

As soon as they were gone, a man-at-arms, wearing the uniform of the Civic Guard, emerged from the shadow of a tower. "Ye

fiends !" he muttered. "Beware ! for ye shall be thwarted yet."

It is now time to return to Helias, the Prior. After greeting the two persons in monkish dress at the entrance to the cloisters, he passed on to the western end of the nave of the Cathedral. Unlocking the door leading to the monks' walk, he hastily changed his Prior's gown for the steel headpiece, sword, and buff doublet of the Civic Guard.

This done, he muttered to himself, "'Tis time for monks to disguise as soldiers, when knights assume the monkish robes."

After he had effected the transformation, he went and knelt at the altar of St. Giles, in the chapel of the infirmary.

Whilst kneeling there, apparently in deep devotion, he saw one of the false monks return, when he arose and, at a distance, followed him, secreting himself in the shadow of the walls, and so overheard his conversation with John.

He now made his way to where Sir Savaric was busily engaged, superintending the carpenters and others, who were making the framework. Elbowing his way through the crowd, he approached Savaric, when one of the men-at-arms, whose ribs had come in contact with his elbow, said, somewhat surlily,

"How now, comrade? There is no hurry; thou wilt be able to get a sight presently."

"I crave thy pardon, comrade," said the Prior; "but I must have speech at once with the worthy knight, Sir Savaric de Mauleon."

Savaric heard the latter part of this speech, and, recognising the voice of Helias, he said, "Ha! thou hast come. I have waited for thee. Come hither and deliver thy message."

Drawing him apart from the bystanders, he anxiously inquired why he was disguised as a soldier.

Helias then related all that he had seen and heard; and, as he unfolded the scheme of villainy, the ire of the grim old warrior rose, and, in a voice of thunder, he said, "Lead on, and I will follow thee!"

Having entered the precincts of the Priory, they were proceeding through the cloisters to John's chamber, when they met Sir Osbert at the farther end, still disguised as a monk.

"Sir Knight," said he, "thou canst not pass this way. The King has retired to his chamber."

"Sir monk," replied Savaric, "knowest thou not that I have access to the King at any time?"

"I have also the commands of the Prior that none but the King pass this way."

"'Tis a lie," said Helias.

"How now, thou base-born varlet? Durst thou say this to one of my calling?" said Sir Osbert.

"Base-born, sayest thou?" replied the Prior. "Nay, I am better born than thou a hundred times. Knowest thou not that I am the Prior?"

"Thou must think me mad to believe such a tale," said Sir Osbert.

"And thou must be mad to think that we should take thee for a monk, Sir Osbert de Opham," said Savaric.

"As thou hast detected me, Sir Savaric, thou must know that I have the authority of the King for barring thy progress. Thou shalt not pass this way!"

"And thou shalt not stop me," said Savaric, dashing his heavy gauntleted hand full in the face of Sir Osbert, stretching him senseless on the ground, at the same time saying, "Forward, good Prior!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

Monarch and Maid.

Idonea, when she was left by the false monk in the King's chamber, sat gazing at the embers in the fireplace, as if she could picture Pende stretched on a bed of sickness. She remained in this position for some time, entirely lost in her thoughts. Waiting is ever a tedious task ; the minutes seem hours, especially so when we wish to be elsewhere. Therefore, it was not strange that Idonea imagined she had been there a much longer time.

Becoming impatient, she glanced round the chamber, and, to her surprise, noticed for the first time that it was a sleeping apartment. Gaining courage, she arose and walked round, when, to her horror, she discovered, scattered about, different articles, clearly indicating that this was the King's chamber.

Idonea's first thought was to fly back to the shelter of her father's dwelling, and, going to

the door, tried in vain to open it. The door was fast locked, and although she called, there was no one there to answer her.

Finding herself a prisoner, Idonea was really alarmed. She looked round the chamber to see if there were any other means of exit than the door by which she had entered, but there appeared to be none. She, however, found a small dagger with a golden hilt, richly inlaid with precious stones, which she hid in the folds of her dress, determining to defend herself against John; for she now felt sure that it was through his means she had been trapped.

Idonea again seated herself upon the settle by the fireplace opposite the door, so as not to be taken by surprise.

After a time she heard a key placed in the lock and turned cautiously. Idonea started to her feet, and, as the door opened, stood face to face with the King. John carefully closed the door and drew the bolts.

"So, my pretty wench, we have you now in our power," said John.

"My liege," said Idonea, "I appeal to you, as a monarch and a knight, to release me from this captivity, and restore me to my father."

"Ha! ha!" laughed John. "Thou must be simple to think that, once in our power, we should let thee go."

"Is it thus that you repay dutiful service," asked Idonea, with scorn, "knowing that my heart is torn by the loss of my lover in your cause?"

"Maiden," said John, with a scowl, "knowest thou that it was by our orders that thy citizen captain was placed in a position of danger? And, to render it still more so, Sir Osbert de Opham was commanded to drive these same citizens into the Barbican, and thus effectually clear Pende from our path."

"Inhuman fiend!" cried Idonea. "You have caused his death; but learn that, woman as I am, I defy you!"

"Thus do we laugh at thy threats," said John, advancing towards her.

"Stand back, if you value your life!" said Idonea, unsheathing the dagger.

"Fool!" said John. "If thou rousest our anger, beware of our vengeance!"

The King then made a rush at Idonea, and attempted to grasp her arm, intending to wrest the dagger from her; but Idonea was too quick for him, and the dagger was plunged in John's arm.

With the roar of a wild beast, John retreated to the end of the apartment, cursing and vowing vengeance. Snatching a scarf from the

table, he hastily bound it round his arm to staunch the bleeding of the wound.

"Thou scornest our love; now thou shalt feel our hatred," said he, drawing his sword.

"Better death than dishonour," said Idonea, standing erect. "Traitorous King, I fear thee not!"

Again advancing towards her, but this time with drawn sword, John swore that she should die; but ere he had gone a couple of paces, he was seized by a pair of strong arms from behind, and his sword wrested from him.

"Coward, to attack a defenceless woman!" said Vynet, thrusting the King aside, and snapping his sword in two across his knee.

"Vynet!" said John, turning pale with anger and fear.

"Yes, Vynet, at whose mercy you now stand! What have you to say that I should not kill you like a dog, as you deserve?"

"Have mercy, good Vynet!" said John, in abject terror; "and we will reward thee."

"Neither your words nor oaths are to be trusted," said Vynet.

"We will swear, upon this holy reliquary, to raise thee to a good position if thou wilt spare our life," whined John.

"Can you restore my face to its former shape, and eradicate this terrible gash, that

you inflicted in your rage?" sternly demanded Vynet. "I trust you not, nor want your rewards; but an act of justice you shall do before you die. Kneel to this maiden, whom you have insulted, and ask her forgiveness."

"A King does not kneel to his subjects," said John, with anger.

"Nevertheless, I have determined that, King as you are, you shall kneel or die on the spot," said Vynet, drawing his sword.

Just at that moment a loud knocking was heard, and the voice of Savaric de Mauleon loudly demanding admission.

"You hear the knocking?" said Vynet. "There are others to call you to account—kneel!"

John reluctantly knelt in front of Idonea, and said, "Lady, we pray thy forgiveness; and, if thou hast any influence with Vynet, entreat him to spare us."

"I have never seen him until now," said Idonea; "but he has my gratitude for protecting me."

Whilst Idonea was thus replying, those outside the door were threatening to burst it open, and were already giving it some heavy blows, when Vynet, seeing John engaged with Idonea, attempted to cross the chamber in order to unbolt the door. John saw his chance

and leapt to his feet in a moment, while Idonea, fearing for her brave rescuer, screamed "Take heed!"

Vynet, hearing the scream, turned round, only to receive John's dagger full in his chest; and, ere he could recover himself, the King had given him another thrust. With a superhuman effort, Vynet threw John to the ground, and then fell down beside him, the blood gushing from the wounds he had received.

So great was John's hatred towards Vynet, that, raising himself to a kneeling position, he stabbed him over and over again, uttering imprecations the while dreadful to hear.

Idonea, at first paralysed with horror, and then realising that she was again in John's power, glided to the door; and, before John knew what was being done—so intent was he in wreaking his vengeance on the prostrate body of Vynet—she had unbolted the door, and had fallen fainting to the ground.

Hearing the bolt withdrawn, Savaric de Mauleon pushed the door open and rushed into the chamber, followed by the Prior and several knights and men-at-arms, who had been attracted by the noise.

The scene that met their eyes would seem strange to one unacquainted with those

evil times. Vynet lay weltering in his blood upon the oak floor of the chamber, the King bending over him, his dagger reeking with gore, whilst his face and garments were smeared and bloody; Idonea was stretched on the floor in a death-like swoon; and over all the rays of the lamp shedding a dim light.

The Prior bent over Idonea, and, gently lifting her up, placed her on the bench.

"Is she dead?" asked Savaric.

"No, my son; she has only swooned," replied Helias.

"But whom have we here?" asked Savaric, gazing at the lifeless body of Vynet.

"A traitor whom we have slain—Vynet! who has so often thwarted us," replied John.

"Why was this lady in your chamber?" asked Savaric.

"We know not," replied John. "On returning to this chamber, we found both her and Vynet here; and he not only bolted the door, but attacked us. In the conflict our sword was broken, leaving us at his mercy. When he heard you knocking at the door, he lost his presence of mind, and we despatched him with our royal dagger."

"You tell a lying tale," said Savaric. "We know that Sir Osbert de Opham inveigled the

Portreeve's daughter thither, to pander to thy vices."

"Sir Savaric, thou art not our Father Confessor," said John, haughtily.

"The saints be praised I am not. Methinks my hair would stand on end at the recital of your evil deeds," rejoined Savaric.

"Sir Savaric, thou art insulting," said John. "May we know by what right thou intrudest upon our privacy?"

"I came to protect this lady from your machinations," replied Savaric.

"What is she to thee," sneered John, "that thou shouldst undertake this feat of knight-errantry?"

"My niece," replied Savaric, sternly, "the child of my dead sister."

Nicholas Lethenard had now arrived, and Idonea, who had by this time regained consciousness, desired her father to take her from the King's presence and that fatal chamber.

"Fear not, Idonea," said Savaric. "Has the King wounded thee?"

"No, uncle. He would have done so but for the interference of that brave man, who now lies dead upon the floor. Take me home, I entreat thee; my senses are wandering. The terrible scene I have just witnessed has unnerved me."

Savaric and Nicholas quickly conducted Idonea from the chamber. John soon after vacated the room, declaring that he could not sleep there again.

At midnight the monks laid Vynet to rest in their burying ground, within the walls of the Priory, by the light of torches, Savaric and Helias, now robed in his monkish gown, following him to the grave.

CHAPTER XXXII.

Generous Foes.

When darkness began to set in, D'Albini and Reginald descended to the Hall, where they had left Pende, attended by one of the menials of the Castle. They found him somewhat recovered from the blow he had received. When Pende saw them, he rose and said, "Noble Knights, I thank you for your kind treatment. I expected nothing short of death, when I found myself within the Barbican."

"Thou didst judge us somewhat harshly," said Reginald. "How dost thou find thyself now?"

"Better in body, though there is a troublesome noise in my head; but I am anxious as to the fate of Idonea, the Portreeve's daughter."

"If she has fallen into any snare of John's, dost think thou couldst save her?" queried D'Albini.

"I do not know, but I would do all that man could do to rescue or defend her."

"If we liberate thee, wilt thou swear not to bear arms against us again?" asked D'Albini.

"Nay, more than that; I will influence the citizens to remain neutral," replied Pende.

"Then thou shalt be put outside the Castle walls at once," said D'Albini.

"It may endanger the safety of the garrison to open the gates of the Barbican," said Pende.

"Dost think that, because thou didst enter that way, there are no other means of leaving this grim fortress?" said Reginald.

"It is the only way I know of," replied Pende.

"We shall liberate thee by the secret outlet near the water-tower," said D'Albini. "The tide is low, and thou wilt find thyself not far from the bridge. I advise thee to keep thyself secreted from John and his mercenaries. Dost thou think thou wilt be able to enter the city secretly?"

"Yes, easily," rejoined Pende. "The whole of the gates and walls of the city are guarded by the citizens; and, when we cut away the centre arch of the bridge, I caused to be constructed a ladder and platform from arch to arch, to enable us to get down to the boats which are moored there, in case they should be wanted."

"Then follow us, and we will lower thee to the foreshore," said D'Albini.

Pende arose, and, at the suggestion of Reginald, left his steel cap and armour behind, and disguised himself as a Norman man-at-arms. He then followed them across the courtyard till they arrived at the Water Tower and ascended to the chamber, from which we have previously seen Vynet lowered.

Taking leave of the knights, he was let down to the bottom of the cavity; and then, releasing the rope, it was hauled back and the trap door closed and bolted.

Pende groped his way to the outlet, and found himself upon the foreshore of the river. Creeping along under the shadow of the walls, till he came to the foundations of the Bridge, he then climbed on to one of the starlings. Once there, he was able to make his way to the centre of the Bridge, and, ascending the ladder, he saw who was on duty, whilst he was hidden in the obscurity of the mist that hung over the river.

From this point of vantage he was able to observe the watch fire burning on the Bridge, as well as the sentry, who was conversing with several others of the Civic Guard and a few of the soldiers belonging to the different leaders. They were seated on some of the beams that

had been removed from the Bridge, busily engaged in conversation about Pende ; and several times he heard tales related about himself, which caused him to blush with pride.

It was fully an hour ere the sentinel was relieved, and then the party gathered round the fire made a move to enter within the walls of the city.

The relieving man-at-arms, after watching his comrades depart, heaped more fuel on the fire and then marched to the centre of the Bridge, and looked down the chasm into the river below.

Pende had recognised the soldier, who by good chance happened to be one of the men he employed at his armoury.

"Hubert!" said Pende, in a low voice.

The soldier started and listened. "I could have sworn I heard the Captain's voice. Bah! it must have been my fancy. I shall never hear it more."

Again came the voice, "Hubert! 'Tis I, Robert Pende!"

Quickly turning to the point where the ladder was fastened, he saw Pende's face on a level with the roadway, peering out of the darkness.

"Do I really once more behold thee alive, Captain?" inquired Hubert, joyfully.

"As much alive as ever, Hubert, notwithstanding an ugly blow I received on the head from a mace. Art thou alone?"

"Yes; all the others have gone to the taverns, or home to rest."

"I do not at present want my escape to be known, for there is treachery at work. We were purposely driven into the Barbican, and we might all have been driven into the Castle moat if it had not been for D'Albini, who kept those, who were driving us on, in check by his archers."

"But how didst thou escape with thy life from the Castle?" inquired Hubert.

"I did not escape, but was set free and lowered from the walls to the river side. Who is on duty at the Barbican?"

"None but our own men."

"Then, if thou wilt move slowly, so that I can hide behind thee and continue to advance to the Barbican, I can pass unnoticed to the High Street. They will think that I am one of the men belonging to the King."

Pende ascended to the roadway of the Bridge, and, keeping well in the shadow of Hubert as they passed the watch-fire, soon found himself under the Barbican of the City.

Entering noiselessly the guard room, he beheld those who were to take their turn of

duty during the night, seated round the guard-room fire, and one of the citizens was exhibiting his sword. "This blade," he said, "was the last piece of work done by our Captain. Mine was stolen from the guard-room by some of the robbers who belong to the mercenary leaders, and the Captain made another. I saw him forge it with mine own eyes, and a better sword ne'er graced man's hand."

"Aye," said one, "he was as good an armourer as ever lived."

"Wilt exchange for mine, and I will give thee a leathern doublet to boot?" said another.

"No," replied the owner of the sword. "Robert Pende will never make another sword, and I will keep it and use it upon his enemies, e'en though I lose my life in so doing."

"Be not so sure that I shall never temper another sword," said Pende, advancing into the guard-room"

"What, Captain! alive and well?" they asked, pressing round him, and shaking him by the hand.

Pende, after the greetings were over, related all he knew of the treachery of John, and the generous treatment he had met with from D'Albini; and concluded by asking the men not to join in any attack upon the Castle, but

only to guard the city walls, and keep the fact of his being alive and free a secret to themselves. This the citizens readily promised to do.

Pende now desired one of the men to relieve Hubert, which was quickly done, and together the twain passed down the High Street to Pende's dwelling.

Hubert unlocked the door, and said, "Come in, comrade, and I will give thee a stoup of wine, for it has been none too warm upon the Bridge."

Hubert said this as several parties of men were loitering about in the street.

Entering the house, Hubert locked and barred the door, and, going to the kitchen at the back of the house, he gave his master a drink of wine, and was about to place food before him, when Pende said, "Although I have eaten nothing, I cannot do so now until I know whether Idonea is safe."

"She was greatly disheartened when she heard of thy supposed death. This will be a cheerful surprise for her."

"Go, good Hubert, by the back way, and desire our worthy Portreeve to come hither, if he is within."

Hubert departed, and, entering the Portreeve's dwelling, asked to see him. He was

sent upstairs to a room, which we have before described. Here he found not only Nicholas, but also his daughter, and Sir Savaric.

Idonea had just finished giving an account of all that had happened at the Priory, when Hubert spoke to Nicholas, and asked if he would step into the armourer's shop.

"Why, Hubert, is aught the matter? I thought thou wert on duty for the night," said Nicholas.

"There was someone inquiring for thee, and I was directed to guide thee to him."

"I will come with thee at once," replied Nicholas.

The Portreeve accompanied Hubert, and, entering the armourer's dwelling, was surprised when he beheld Pende.

Seizing his hand, he gave it a hearty shake, and said, "Robert, I am glad to see thee alive. Thou must come and assure Idonea of thy safety."

"Are any strangers there?"

"None but mine own family."

"Idonea thought me dead. Thou hadst better prepare her before I enter."

"Nonsense! Joy never kills."

Leading the way, Nicholas was quickly back again in his own room. As he entered the door, he said, "Dry thy tears, daughter;

Robert has returned, safe and sound." The next moment Idonea was folded in the strong arms of Robert.

Savaric also came forward, and said, "Let me add my congratulations to the warm welcome of my niece."

"Niece!" ejaculated Pende.

"Yes, Robert; I have found an uncle," said Idonea, "who has protected me from the fury of the King."

"Art thou hungry?" asked the Portreeve.

"Very," said Pende. "I have tasted only a piece of horseflesh, and a drink of water, for several hours."

"Sit thee down at once and eat thy fill, and Idonea shall tell thee of her adventures; and, when thou hast satisfied thine hunger, we will hear the particulars of thy escape," said Nicholas.

Pende, without any ceremony, attacked the good cheer that was upon the table; and Idonea related her story, which he heard with indignation.

When Pende had finished his repast, he told them how he was struck down by a mace, and of the noble treatment of D'Albini, who advised him to keep himself under cover, which advice Savaric approved of, knowing John's malicious nature.

"D'Albini is a noble knight," said Savaric. "I will, if possible, protect him from John's vengeance when the Castle is taken. It cannot hold out long ; and he will never surrender, I feel sure."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

The Fall of the Castle.

Some days had now elapsed since the events recorded in the last chapter. The citizen-soldiers had withdrawn from taking an active part in the siege of the Castle, and confined their duties to the watch and ward upon the walls and gates of the city. The citizens were greatly incensed against John for his treachery to their Captain, and his dishonourable treatment of their Portreeve's daughter.

Pende kept himself secluded during the day-time, but in the evening, when dusk set in, he, in company with others of the Civic Guard, went out to get fresh air, and to watch how matters progressed, for Pende felt great pity for those whom he knew were starving within the Castle.

We also will see what had been done during the last few days.

The chalk, that had been shot into the moat, was sufficient to form a broad roadway to the

foot of the walls. With pick, crowbar and shovel they had attacked the foundations of the walls under cover of the "sow." The besieged had tried in vain to penetrate its untanned hides, but it seemed impervious to anything that could be cast upon it, so well had its construction been carried out.

A huge, tunnel-like aperture had been made level with the chalk causeway, and the earth and stones that were excavated had been thrown into the moat.

The cavity went completely under the outer walls, and the miners were engaged in removing the foundation of the south-east angle of the Keep. This was a work of great danger; but every precaution was taken, the earth and masonry above their heads being shored up with large baulks of timber, the tunnel resembling a huge skeleton.

When the decisive moment arrived, it was proposed to remove these struts by means of long ropes, which were to be attached to horses and drawn from their position. It was anticipated that the walls would then, like those of Jericho, fall at the sound of the bugles, which was to be the signal.

So certain was Sir Savaric of the success of his work, which was nearly completed, that he

proposed on the morrow to assemble the whole of the troops round the Castle, and, at the given signal, to see the tower fall down. It was then his intention to storm the Castle, and to rush in by the breach caused by the collapse of the tower.

The calculation of Sir Savaric de Mauleon was, like many other calculations both before and since, to be upset by the intervention of the elements.

On the last day of November, there was a strong wind blowing from the north-east, which increased to a gale towards the middle of the day ; but still the besiegers worked on, utterly oblivious of the fact that the Medway was already swollen and that its angry waves were dashing against the banks.

Suddenly there arose a roar—the Medway had overleaped its bounds and was rushing in cascades over the banks, carrying with it on its onward rush anything of a buoyant nature that lay within its course. (11)

Many of the mercenaries had encamped outside the walls of the City, especially on the north and east sides, where they felt secure from the arrows of the besieged. These men were the first to find out what the overflow meant. Their tents were torn by the wind and then scattered by the influx of the tide.

A number of the besiegers had gathered round to view the rush of water, which had now penetrated many of the low lying parts of the City, and had also flooded the moats both of the City and Castle, whilst men-at-arms were wading knee deep round the walls. But what cared these men of war for a wetting ; it was only water and could do no great harm.

Such was their reasoning, but small incidents often pave the way for larger ones. The water had risen to the entrance of the tunnel, and now began to pour into it. Still the men continued their work, although in some parts they were up to their knees in water, and in others it reached to their armpits.

Suddenly those who were working in the tunnel noticed that large masses of earth kept falling from the roof into the water ; and the next moment, without any warning, the whole fell in, burying those who were beneath it, suffocating them as they stood.

The knights and others, who were opposite the entrance, saw the collapse of the tunnel, followed immediately by a terrible sound of cracking in the angle of the great Keep. Then amidst a profound silence, for the onlookers held their breath, the south-east tower was seen to tremble, totter and then fall outwards,

crashing through the outer wall and falling into the moat, while a large quantity of the debris covered the farther bank of the moat.

With the falling tower came the knights and men-at-arms, who were in that part of the Keep, at the time it severed from the main part. Like some revengeful giant it killed all who came within its clutches.

Sir William D'Albini, who was standing upon the outer walls at the time, was precipitated on to the bank of the moat, stunned. He was noticed by Pende and some of the Civic Guard, and at once pulled out, just as Sir Osbert de Opham arrived upon the scene. He at once claimed him as his prisoner, delivering him into the charge of his men.

Bugles were now blown, war-cries shouted, and the leaders, followed by their men, rushed over the debris to the gap, caused by the falling tower; and then commenced a hand to hand fight. The garrison, led on by De Cornhill, fought bravely; but worn out by incessant watching and want of food, besides being outnumbered by the vast hordes who kept pouring into the Castle, they were disarmed and taken prisoners.

King John now made a somewhat tardy appearance. Unlike his illustrious brother,

Richard Cour de Lion, who at the clash of armour, was always drawn towards it, John was cowardly, and loved not to venture in the mêlée, contenting himself with being a spectator.

He did not climb over the breach in the walls, but rode in over the drawbridge, which had been lowered, and thence under the Barbican, where he was met by Sir Savaric de Mauleon.

"My liege," he said, "we have won the Castle, and have gathered the prisoners in the great courtyard. By my faith they are starved and look like scarecrows."

"It matters not about their looks; they shall all die," replied John.

"My liege, I claim your promise, sworn on the blessed crucifix, that the knights should be saved," said Savaric.

"Wouldst thou protect rebels from the just anger of the King?"

"No! but I can and will protect brave knights, who have fought manfully in a cause they believed to be just."

"E'en have thy way," replied John with an oath. "But kark ye! remove them to the Priory and guard them well, for we shall hold thee responsible for their safety."

"As prisoners, but honourable ones, will I guard them, and answer for their well-being," replied Savaric.

Savaric returned to the courtyard, and marched the knights, who were strongly guarded, to the Priory, selecting the cells of the monks for their prison, and placing a strong guard in the corridor.

No sooner had Savaric departed, than Sir Osbert said to the King, "My liege, De Mauleon will but half accomplish his self-imposed task of protecting the knights against vengeance."

"What meanest thou?" asked John.

"That when the tower fell, D'Albini was thrown, stunned, into the moat, and rescued by the citizens. I claimed him as my prisoner, and had him conveyed to the chamber in which Vynet was killed, thinking that a second act of retribution would give the worthy monks something to pray for, tc cleanse their Priory from pollution."

"Then he shall die, in spite of De Mauleon," replied the King.

"Lead on to the other prisoners!"

In the great courtyard were gathered the garrison of the Castle—men, who would have moved the pity of anyone worthy of the name of manhood. They were all emaciated and wounded, unlike the strong men-at-arms

who had entered the Castle only a few weeks before. Their captors were not like men, but fiends. Directly John reached the courtyard, he gloated over the looks of suffering that he beheld on the countenances of the remnant of the garrison.

He then commanded that the whole of the prisoners should be slaughtered where they stood. They were not aware of this cruel order ; and when they saw their guards draw their swords, they expected it would be to conduct them to some strong dungeon. They were quickly undeceived however, when they saw that the heads of their comrades were being cut off. On all sides they were attacked by John's cut-throats, and in a very short time they lay a heap of murdered victims.

John stopped and saw his orders executed, and then went over the Castle to see what damage had been done.

Directly the King left the courtyard the men, who had executed John's cruel commands, started like vultures to rob the dead of the clothing and valuables that they had about them, in some cases entirely stripping the bodies.

Meanwhile Savaric had learned from Pende of the captivity of D'Albini, who had been conveyed insensible to the King's chamber.

Savaric called to several of his men to follow him, intending to beat off the guard at the door, and to transfer D'Albini to the place he had assigned to the other knights.

Helias, who had heard Pende's communication, said to Savaric, "Thou wilt need no attendants. Come with me!"

The Prior then took Savaric to his apartment, and from thence by the secret way to John's chamber.

They found D'Albini recovered; and telling him of his danger, he at once followed Savaric to the monk's cell.

When John returned to the Priory, he, in company with Sir Osbert, went to the chamber to wreak his vengeance upon D'Albini; but after passing the guard at the door, they found the chamber vacant.

"If we had not killed Vynet with our own hands, we should have thought it was some of his work," said John.

They questioned the guard outside, but no one had entered the chamber since Sir Osbert had left them to guard it.

John then retired to the Chapter Room of the Priory, where he determined to have a final revel at the expense of the Priory.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

Conclusion.

The day following the capitulation of the Castle the whole of the knights were sent, under a strong escort, to the Castles of Corfe and Nottingham, from which they were released on the death of King John, less than twelve months afterwards.

William D'Albini succeeded to the Earldom of Arundel. He, after his liberation, travelled to Italy, and died as he was returning from that country in the year 1221.

John placed Sir Osbert de Opham in charge of the Castle, with orders to repair as far as possible the ravages of the siege.

Within the next few days John departed with his mercenaries on the way to London, intending to attack the Metropolis, but on approaching its walls he found the brave citizens of London so well defended in their stronghold, and presenting such a bold front

to him, their yells of defiance striking terror to his craven heart, that he turned his back upon them and proceeded to Nottingham, marking his route by bloodshed, rapine, and unheard of cruelties.

Let us see what reward John bestowed upon the citizens of Rochester for espousing and helping his cause. Had they joined hands with D'Albini it is more than probable that John would have been effectually checked in his career of crime; or at the worst would have left the road open between Rochester and London for escape by means of the Bridge.

There is no record relating to this period that shows anything that John did for the benefit of the citizens, who had so nobly assisted him.

On the contrary there are many historic facts, proving that Rochester was left by him in a most deplorable condition.

On his departure, the Castle, which has at all times been the pride of the inhabitants of Rochester, could be seen with its walls dismantled, and the angle of the great Keep thrown down, the moat partially filled in, and its late garrison ruthlessly butchered—a decomposed and ghastly heap, which had to be buried by the citizens.

The Bridge also had, by John's commands, been cut away in the centre, and to the citizens lay the task of seeing it repaired, and enforcing the contributory manors to bear their part towards the same—by no means an easy task in the unsettled state of England. ([12])

The Priory of Saint Andrew suffered much. The altars and shrines had been dismantled, and the monks illtreated and robbed of every valuable that the monastery contained. Its cellars were cleared of the stores of food and wine, which had been placed there to supply the monks with provisions during the winter months, John himself sanctioning all kinds of sacrilege and debauchery within its holy walls.

The citizens were even worse off. Some lives had been lost during the siege, while many had ugly wounds, the scars of which they would carry to the grave. Their houses had been invaded and robbed by the cut-throats and murderers who had accompanied John to Rochester. In several cases the females had been treated with great indignity; so that it was no wonder the citizens viewed the departure of John and his army with the greatest satisfaction.

Robert Pende soon recovered his usual health, and busied himself with Nicholas Lethenard

in relieving to the uttermost the wants of those poorer neighbours, who had most felt the effects of the siege.

Idonea often thought of her almost miraculous escape from John; and shuddered when she recalled to her mind the terrible events she had witnessed in the Priory.

Robert Pende and Idonea were united in the Cathedral, by Prior Helias, at Christmas, when the whole of the Civic Guard mustered to grace the wedding of their Captain and Portreeve's daughter. Their armour, which Pende thought to present to them new on his wedding day, was now proudly worn, not in its freshness and beauty as he had intended, but battered and soiled, telling of many blows that had been received, and of the great service it had rendered to the wearer in protecting his life.

The City of Rochester was again the scene of warfare, when Louis the Dauphin, in the year 1216, at the invitation of the Barons of England, who found themselves unable to cope with John, came to the coast of Kent, with a fleet of 700 vessels and landed at Sandwich. After spending three months besieging Dover Castle, which was so bravely defended by Hubert de Burgh, that he had to abandon

the siege. Louis next proceeded to Rochester Castle, and on his way was met by Gualo, the Pope's Legate, who excommunicated Louis and all his army for daring to invade England. Louis was at first intimidated ; but after a time, when he found that the sun was not darkened, that the elements did not fight against him, nor his camp become depopulated, he set the Legate at defiance, and marched on his way.

Rochester Castle, owing to the injuries it had sustained at the hands of John, was speedily reduced, and Sir Osbert de Opham was slain. The citizens of Rochester, during the conflict, merely acted the part of onlookers.

John's famous passage of the Wash, where he lost all his baggage and stores, followed by his sudden death at the Castle of Newark-on-Trent, are subjects with which every school boy is acquainted, and there is no need to repeat the story here.

On the death of John, who justly earned the unenviable title of "The worst Monarch that ever sat on the throne of England," and the accession of his son Henry III., the Barons of England returned to their allegiance to the crown, causing the retreat of Louis to France, thus putting an end to the rebellion.

During the early part of Henry III's reign, the City of Rochester was left in peace, which enabled the citizens to recover from the injuries received during the "SECOND SIEGE OF ROCHESTER CASTLE."

THE END.

HISTORICAL NOTES.

1.—Textus Roffensis.

There is a curious manuscript in the Library of Rochester Cathedral, well known to the literary world as the Textus Roffensis, compiled by Bishop Ernulphus, in the early part of the twelfth century, and referred to as an authority by William of Malmesbury. There is much valuable local information contained in this book, many passages of which are clearly transcripts from Saxon writers of a much earlier date than Ernulph, and to whose works he frequently refers.

This manuscript, interesting as it is, never has been fully published, although it was partially so by Herne, in the year 1720. This is a fact the more to be regretted, as it has already encountered one or two narrow escapes from loss, which have been thus described by Pegge and Gough.

"The Textus Roffensis is a small quarto, bound in red. It is written on vellum in a very elegant hand. Besides the affairs of the Cathedral of Rochester, it furnishes us with the laws of several Saxon Kings (four of Kent, omitted by Lambarde). During the civil wars this book was lodged in the hands of Sir Roger Twysden, and Hearne printed it from a transcript in the hands of Sir Edward Dering—Dr. Leonard stole it, and kept it two years, till Dean Balcanqual and the Chapter filed a Bill in Chancery against him in 1633. At its return to Rochester it fell into the water, but was recovered without much hurt, except being a little tarnished by the salt water."—*Phippen's Descriptive Sketches of Rochester, &c.*

R

2.—Rainham Church.

On the 20th of October, 1791, the steeple of this edifice was greatly damaged by a storm of thunder and lightning, which also split the wall for several feet in length.—*Ireland's History of Kent.*

3.—Water Stairs of the Castle.

There is no account in any book describing the Water Stairs of the Castle, but the Civic Seal of Rochester, which is at present in use, and is conjectured to be as ancient as the Charter of the City, granted in the 14th century, shews on one side the Castle of Rochester, with wooden stairs leading to the river, defended by two embattled towers and a portcullis. This is the only authority I have for assuming that such was the case.

4.—Gundulf's Tower.

This ruinous tower is situated on the north side of the Cathedral, between the two cross aisles, and is ascribed to Bishop Gundulf. For what purpose it was intended is a matter of doubt, some antiquarians agreeing that it was for a belfry, it having been called the five-bell tower, and others that it was intended to be used as a depository for treasure and records. It is of great strength, the walls being six feet thick, and contains two rooms. It was originally entered at the top of the tower from a curious winding staircase of stone, leading from the roof of the Cathedral, and is 65 feet high.

5.

Stephen Langton was invited to attend a council at Rome, but after he had embarked on the voyage, the sentence of suspension was proclaimed against him. He was not allowed to land on English soil again, until he had paid a heavy fine for his contempt

of the papal decree. Stephen Langton was hardly the kind of man to admit himself in the wrong by paying a fine, so he preferred to stay abroad during the rest of John's reign.—*Rev. C. H. Lane's English Church History.*

6.—Fitz-Walter at Dartford.

The Noble men, that maintained the warre against King John, understanding that he laide siege to the Castle at Rochester, and fearing that William D'Albiney (or D'Albinet) the Captaine thereof coulde not long defende it without supply of such things as he wanted, and they could not well minister: determined to give some adventure to raise the siege. And for that purpose made Robert Fitz-Walter general of a great armie. This man, when he came to Dartforde, mette with a Gentleman of the Order of the Temple, of whom he demanded sundry questions for intelligence of the number of the King's campe. Who (finding him to be afraid) told him of set purpose, that the King's armie was much greater than his, whereas in deede his power was thrise so big as the King's. Hereupon Robert (being with this false terrour stricken into an exceeding great fearre, whose companion is flight, as Homer saith), without further inquisition, sought to save himselfe by the swiftnes of his feet, and so through a faint hart left Rochester to the uttermost adventure.—*Lambarde*, 1570.

7.—Death of Arthur.

Of the fate of the young Arthur, no authentic details have been recorded. That his youth and innocence did not save him from the bloody hands of John is certain, but of the manner in which he came by his death we can only form an idea by comparing the different stories which are current on the subject among the old chroniclers. Arthur was conveyed by his uncle to the Castle of Falaise, whence he was removed to that of Rouen. There he

disappeared, and there ends the narrative of sober fact, the rest bringing us into the region of conjecture and probability. The Normans, who remained loyal to the English King, spread a report that Arthur died of sickness in the Castle of Rouen, or was killed in attempting to make his escape; this statement may be at once rejected as a mere invention, and not a very ingenious one. The account given by some of the French chroniclers is to the following effect :—John, having visited his nephew at Falaise, desired him to put confidence in his uncle. Arthur rejected his advances, and said indignantly, "Give me my inheritance, the Kingdom of England." The King then sent him to Rouen, strongly guarded, and not long afterwards he suddenly disappeared. It was suspected by all men that John had murdered his nephew with his own hands, and he became the object of the deepest hatred. The monks of Margan relate that John killed the prince in a fit of drunkenness, and caused his body to be thrown into the Seine, with stones tied to his feet, but that notwithstanding these, it was cast on the bank, and was buried at the Abbey of Bec secretly, for fear of the tyrant. —*Cassell's History of England.*

8.

D'Albinit made an obstinate defence, and baffled, for three months, all the efforts of the besiegers: during which the City suffered much; and the garrison in the Castle was reduced to such extremities, that they ate all their horses.—*Wildash's History of Rochester.*

9.

An attack on Jerusalem was commenced June 7th, 1099, headed by Godfrey of Bouillon, Tancred, Robert of Normandy, and Robert of Flanders. The Barbicans were carried and a portion of the walls thrown down; but such was the strength of the fortifications, and so obstinate the defence of the Turks, that it became necessary to construct engines of assault similar to those which had been used in

the siege of Nice. Catapults and movable towers were prepared, and to these was added a machine called the "sow," made of wood and covered with raw hides to protect it from fire. The hollow space within was filled with soldiers, who, with this protection, were occupied in undermining the walls.—*Cassell's History of England.*

10.—Subterranean Passages.

Local tradition assigns several of these subterranean passages from the Castle to different parts of the City. The Restoration House, Rochester, possesses one of these, leading from the House to the River Medway, which has been partly explored by the owner, Stephen T. Aveling, Esq.

11.—High Tides.

During the last few years we have experienced several High Tides and overflowings of the Medway, doing great damage; but there are also recorded in *Ireland's History of Kent* accounts of several instances of the vagaries of the River. "A.D., 86, a great inundation of the river Medway and several inhabitants of Maidstone were drowned; and again in the year 861 another inundation, drowning a number of cattle."

12.—Rochester Bridge, Contributory Manors.

Memorandums plainly showing by whom the Bridge at Rochester should be repaired, as often as it is broken.

The first land pier on the east side of the river shall be built or repaired by the bishop of Rochester; to plank three virgates or yards, and to lay three sullivas or large beams on the bridge; and this to be done by Borstale, Cuckstone, Frindsbury, and Stoke.

The second pier belongs to Gillingham and Chatham; they shall lay three beams, and plank one yard.

The third pier belongs to the abovesaid bishop of Rochester; he shall lay three beams, and plank two yards and a half, and this to be done by Halling, Trottesclive, Malling, Southfleet, Stanes, Penenden, and Fakenham.

The fourth pier is the king's; and he shall lay three beams and plank three yards and a half to be done by Aylesford, and by all the hundred pertaining to it, and by those on the hills, by Ockley, by Smalland, and Cossington, and Dudsland, and Gislardsland, and Woldham, and Burham, and Acclise, and Horsted, and Farley, and Festan, and Chalk, and Honhirst, and Edon, and Bouchold, and Lose, and Lillington, and Stockbury, and Sineland, and Daleland, and Lechebundaland.

The fifth pier belongs to the Archbishop of Canterbury, and he shall plank four yards and lay three beams, and this to be done by Wrotham, Maidstone, Wattringbury, Nettlesterd, the two Peckhams, Haselholt, Mereworth, Layborne, Swanton, Offham, Ditton, and Westerham.

The sixth pier to be done by Hollingborne and all that hundred which belongs to it; four yards to plank, and four beams to lay.

The seventh and eighth piers belong to the men of the hundred of Hoo; six beams to lay, and four yards and a half to plank.

The ninth and last pier belongs to the Archbishop of Canterbury, which is the west end; he shall lay three beams, and plank four yards: this to be done by Northfleet, Clive, Higham, Denton, Milton, Ludesdown, Mepham, Snodland, Berling, Paddlesworth, and all the men of that valley.

These shall repair the bridge at Rochester, whenever it is broken; and let it be noticed, that all the beams which are placed in this bridge ought to be of large dimensions, that they may well support the planks, and the great weight of all those things that pass over them.— *Wildash's History and Antiquities of Rochester.*

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